★ BRAND NEW WESTERN STORIES ★

FAMOUS WESTERN

25¢

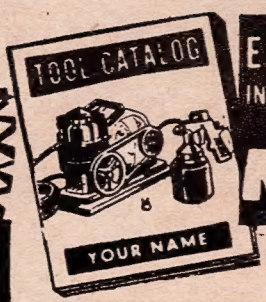
JUNE

APR 20
5

THE OVERLAND DEATH
by Pidge Short

FOR VENGEANCE ALONE
by Lauran Paine

Tools Wholesale



EARN BIG *Spot Cash* PROFITS
IN A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN.. FULL OR PART TIME

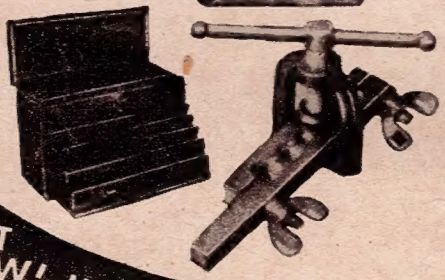
MAKE $20 A DAY

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED TOOLS

at a Wholesale DISCOUNT up to

50% OFF

You can buy as you need it. A million dollar inventory at your fingertips.
. . . Stanley, Millers Falls, Plumb, Disston, Wiss, Black & Decker, Clemson, Thor, Ridgid, K & E, Lufkin and hundreds of other nationally advertised name bread tools, appliances, motors, electric tools, power tools and others too numerous to mention.



You can buy Nationally Advertised Hand Tools, Power Tools, Appliances and Hardware at a DISCOUNT up to

50% OFF

Order as you need it. No Investment Required.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Sell tools to your friends, neighbors, for industrial and institutional use. Everyone needs tools. Meet the demands of the tremendous Do-It-Yourself Market. Build your own business selling nationally advertised tools from an illustrated coded catalog bearing your name and only your name on it. You get all the orders and reorders. You sell merchandise that is pre-sold for you through national advertising by the country's leading tool manufacturers, such as Black and Decker, Clemson, Disston, K & E, Lufkin, Millers Falls, Ridgid, Stanley, Thor, Wiss and many others! You need not carry any stock—use our capital! All orders received are shipped the same day from our warehouse stock of over 15,000 items. All merchandise sold on unconditional money-back guarantee, Don't Wait. Act today! Send $1.00 Deposit for Dealer's card and get our giant new 1956 wholesale catalog at no extra charge. Your $1.00 is credited to your first purchase or refunded if you are not 100% satisfied. MAIL COUPON NOW! Tool Discount House, Dept. 33, 318 Market St. Newark, New Jersey.

ACT NOW! MAIL COUPON TODAY!

ENCLOSE $1.00 FOR DEALERS CARD & MAMMOTH TOOL CATALOG

1956 WHOLESALE CATALOG

- Hand Tools
- Power Tools
- Hardware
- Appliances

100% MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

This Coupon Gets You Started!

TOOL DISCOUNT HOUSE DEPT 33
318 Market St. Newark, N. J

I am enclosing $1.00. Rush me your dealer's card and big Catalog Today. If I am not completely satisfied with your plan, I understand that I can return the Dealer's Card and Catalog for refund, and if I decide to order, my $1.00 will be deductible from my first order.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____

PICK YOUR OWN SUCCESS STORY FROM THIS PAGE

Wins $3000 contest—"After my I. C. S. courses I secured a new position," says Mr. Cecil Rhodes. "My income has more than doubled and I recently won a $3000 sales contest."

From clerk to Assistant Estimator, thanks to I.C.S. "Any way you look at it," writes Mrs. Edna James, "the time and money one spends for I. C. S. Courses will be repaid a thousandfold."

"As a college graduate, I found I. C. S. very valuable." Robert Lee took the I. C. S. Course in Advertising, is now Promotion Manager for a large corporation. "I. C. S. got me started on the way up," he says.

From $152 to $385 a month—"I. C. S. made my engineering work more interesting," Frank Bachtik tells us. "I was a Jr. Draftsman making $152 a month. My present income is $395.25 a month."

These are the true stories of people who seemed trapped in routine, low-pay shaky jobs. Handicapped by lack of proper training, they couldn't get the things they wanted out of life—more money, a job they liked, security and happiness.

They are a small sample of the thousands of men and women—young and old—who turn to I. C. S. for help. Their will-to-learn plus I. C. S. training have changed the course of their lives.

Are you discouraged with your job and pay and feel you can't improve yourself because of lack of specialized education? Well, these men and women were in the same boat. With I. C. S. training, one of these success stories could be about *you*.

I. C. S. is the oldest and largest correspondence school. 256 courses. Business, industrial, engineering, academic, high school. One for you. Direct, job-related. Bedrock facts and theory plus practical application. Complete lesson and answer service. No skimping. Diploma to graduates.

3 FREE BOOKS—a 36-page pocket-size guide to advancement, a gold mine of tips on "How to Succeed." Also a big catalog outlining opportunities in your field of interest and a sample I.C.S. lesson (Math.).

For Real Job Security—Get an I. C. S. Diploma! **I. C. S., Scranton 9, Penna.** Member, National Home Study Council

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 92628D, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

(Partial list of 256 courses)

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW to SUCCEED" and the opportunity booklet about the field BEFORE which I have marked X (plus sample lesson):

ARCHITECTURE and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION
- ☐ Air Conditioning—Refrig
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Interiors
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Building Estimator
- ☐ Building Maintenance
- ☐ Carpentry and Mill Work
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Painting Contractor
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Reading Arch. Blueprints

ART
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Fashion Illustrating
- ☐ Magazine Illustrating
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Sketching and Painting

AUTOMOTIVE
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding
- ☐ Auto Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune Up
- ☐ Automobile Mechanic

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr
- ☐ Aircraft & Engine Mechanic

BUSINESS
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping and Accounting
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Public Accounting
- ☐ Creative Salesmanship
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Letter-writing Improvement
- ☐ Office Management
- ☐ Professional Secretary
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ Sales Management
- ☐ Stenographic-Secretarial
- ☐ Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY
- ☐ Analytical Chemistry
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chem. Lab. Technician
- ☐ General Chemistry
- ☐ Natural Gas Prod. & Trans
- ☐ Petroleum Engineering
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Construction Engineering
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Struct. Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

DRAFTING
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mine Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Plumbing Drawing and Estimating
- ☐ Structural Drafting

ELECTRICAL
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electrician ☐ Contracting
- ☐ Lineman

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ Commercial ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics

LEADERSHIP
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Leadership and Organization
- ☐ Personnel-Labor Relations

MECHANICAL AND SHOP
- ☐ Gas—Electric Welding
- ☐ Heat Treatment ☐ Metallurgy
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Internal Combustion Engines
- ☐ Machine Design-Drafting
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Quality Control
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Tool Design ☐ Toolmaking

RADIO, TELEVISION
- ☐ Industrial Electronics
- ☐ Practical Radio TV Eng'r'ng
- ☐ Radio and TV Servicing
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Television Technician

RAILROAD
- ☐ Air Brake Equipment
- ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Engineer & Fireman
- ☐ Section Foreman

STEAM AND DIESEL POWER
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Diesel—Elec. ☐ Diesel Eng's
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Stationary Fireman
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering

TEXTILE
- ☐ Carding and Spinning
- ☐ Cotton, Rayon, Woolen Mfg.
- ☐ Finishing and Dyeing
- ☐ Loom Fixing ☐ Textile Des'ing
- ☐ Textile Eng'r'g ☐ Throwing
- ☐ Warping and Weaving

MISCELLANEOUS
- ☐ Domestic Refrigeration
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Ocean Navigation
- ☐ Professional Engineering
- ☐ Short Story Writing
- ☐ Telephony

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to P.M._____

Occupation_____

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada. Special tuition rates to members of the U. S. Armed Forces.

FAMOUS WESTERN

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

Volume 17 June, 1956 Number 3

Thrilling Novelets

THE OVERLAND DEATH ..... Pidge Short 6
How had these mail-riders been blown up, and who was behind the atrocities, aimed at wrecking the service?

TRIGGER TREACHERY ..... Elton Webster 31
It's bad enough for a stranger to be suspected of outlawry, but when he makes the local lawmen look like fools . . .

FOR VENGEANCE ALONE ..... Lauran Paine 69
Mark Webb tried to tell himself that he was just helping justice along — Sally Lambert didn't figure into his motives at all.

Short Stories

DIGGER JOHN AND THE SONS ..... A. A. Baker 22
Sheer horror struck Gold Run when the Sons of Temperance destroyed every bottle and barrel of liquor to be found . . .

MARSHAL AND TARGET ..... George Hudson Smith 50
Avenging Marshal David's murder and upholding law came under the same task — but Cal Powers was obliged to get himself killed uselessly!

BULLETS BURY THE PAST ..... Lee Floren 60
Devlin had a killing to perform, but not a murder; and how could he kill a man who wouldn't defend himself without murder?

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor* WILL LUTON, *Art Director*

CLIFF CAMPBELL, *Asso. Ed.*

FAMOUS WESTERN, June, 1956, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Entire contents copyright, 1956, by Columbia Publications, Inc. Single copy 25¢, yearly subscription $1.50. When submitting manuscripts enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable for acceptance. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U. S. A.

J. E. SMITH
President, National Radio Institute. 40 years' experience training men at home for Radio-TV.

I Will Send You A

SAMPLE LESSON FREE

to show you how easy, practical it is to

Train at Home for Good Radio-Television Jobs

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You Good Pay Plus a Bright Future

TRAINING plus OPPORTUNITY is the PERFECT combination for ambitious men. Let me send you a sample lesson from my course to prove you can keep your job while TRAINING at home in your spare time for better pay and a brighter future. I will also send my 64-page book to show you that Radio-Television is today's field of OPPORTUNITY for properly trained men.

Make $10, $15 a Week Extra

Many men I train fix neighbors' Radios, make extra money, soon after they enroll. Actual equipment you build gives you practical experience.

Television's Growth is Making More Jobs, Prosperity

Radio is bigger than ever and television is growing fast. Government, Aviation, Police, Ship, Microwave Relay, Two Way Communications for buses, taxis, railroads are other growing fields for Radio-Television trained men.

Mail Coupon—Find Out About This Tested Way to Better Pay

Take NRI training for as little as $5 a month. Many NRI graduates make more in two weeks than the total cost of my training. Mail coupon today for Actual Lesson and 64-page Book—Both FREE. J. E. SMITH, National Radio Institute, Dept. 6FT Washington 9, D.C. Our 40th Year.

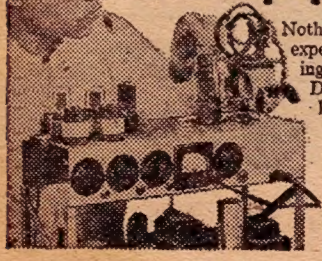
I Trained These Men

"I have a regular job as a police captain and also have a good spare time Radio and Television service business. Just opened my new showrooms and shop."—C. W. LEWIS, Pensacola, Florida.

"I decided to quit my job and do TV work full time. I love my work and am doing all right. If fellows knew what a wonderful investment NRI is, they would not hesitate."—W. F. KLINE, Cincinnati, Ohio.

"Thanks to NRI, I operated a successful Radio repair shop. Then I got a job with WPAQ, later WBOB and now am an engineer for WHPE."—VAN W. WORKMAN, High Point, N. Carolina.

You Learn by Practicing with Equipment I Send



Nothing takes the place of practical experience. That's why NRI training is based on LEARNING BY DOING. My training includes kits of parts which you use to build equipment and get practical experience on circuits common to both Radio and Television. Shown at left is the low-power Broadcasting Transmitter you build as part of my Communications Course.

AVAILABLE TO VETERANS UNDER G.I. BILLS

Good for Both—FREE

Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 6FT
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D.C.
Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book, FREE. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ Zone____ State_____

VETS write in date of discharge_____

Approved Member, National Home Study Council

There was a sudden burst of flame and smoke . . .

Two mail-riders had been blown up, and it was obvious that someone was trying to force Al Lewton out of business. But how were the killings being accomplished?

THE OVERLAND DEATH

Feature Novelet of Sinister Mystery

by PIDGE SHORT

THE VOICE said, "Remember that; I don't want to be implicated in any way. If you have to contact me, do so by a single gunshot at exactly five o'clock in the evening from out on the range in back of town. You understand? A gunshot at exactly five o'clock from in back of town. I'll be here in this room by six o'clock after I hear the shot, with the door locked between us as it is now. That all clear?"

The gunman, slouched on the single chair in the bare room upstairs in the Lincoln House, grinned sardonically to himself, looked at the blank wall that separated him from the hidden man, and felt, someway, that his secretive employer was watching him through a crack, or a hole, in the partition. It amused the Canada Kid that this man would insist on being so completely anonymous. Still, if it was a big wheel in Shaster that was hiring him, he probably couldn't afford to take chances.

"Sure," The Kid answered easily. "One shot at five o'clock an' we meet here, in these rooms, like we're meeting now. Fine. If that's the way you want it, I'll sure do it that way." The Kid squirmed on the hard little chair and hoisted his two guns so that their drag wouldn't be so heavy.

"Now then, let's see if I got this right. You'll give me three little packages now, today, and I'm to mail 'em one by one, every three days, and see that they're taken in the pouch by the overland mail rider; for this, I get one-thousand gold, today, right now—and one-thousand when we meet here again in three days. Right?"

"Correct."

The Kid grinned again at the sepulchral sound of the voice through the wall. "All right, mister, now gimme the parcels and the gold."

There was a sound of a man rising off a chair in the adjoining room, then the door opened a slit and a bundle was slid gingerly into the room. The door was instantly closed, and locked again, and the voice came through the wall, as before.

"Be awfully careful. Inside, there are three small packages. They con-

tain a powerful explosive and might go off prematurally if you don't handle 'em like glass. No bumps." There was a pause, as though the hidden man was listening, then he added words that irritated the Kid. "I've warned you."

"Yeah. Any danger of being blowed up when I open the bundle to get my money out?" He hadn't moved, he just sat still, looking at the bundle with a frown.

"No. They're set to go with jostling and jarring, such as they'd get in the overland rider's pouch. Don't shake them like you was horseback in a bellydown run, and you got nothing to fear." The Kid eyed the bundle distastefully, then the voice came again. "I'm going now. Keep your end of the bargain, Canada Kid, and I'll keep mine."

The Kid nodded in silence, regarding the bundle. *"Si, comita.* Don't worry about my part of the deal at all, s'long." The Kid got up, picked the bundle up carefully and started across the room; he opened the door and closed it while balancing the bundle, then walked lightly down the hall to his own room and laid the thing gingerly on the floor. He looked at it gravely for a while and shrugged. Damndest job he'd ever had. Lightheartedly, the Kid washed sloppily in the basin by the door, combed his tawny hair with bent fingers, unwrapped the big bundle, took one of the small packages and a thick roll of money and left the room. He mailed the package at the overland express office, listened to the old man's assurance that it would leave on the dawn horse, nodded complacently and went down to the *Drover's Saloon*, one-thousand in wealth waiting to be squandered.

AT THE DROVER, men were getting an early start. The sun was just sinking in the west, but the room was already crowded and strong with heavy odors. The Kid stood at the far end of the bar, where he could command a good view, and relaxed. He sipped his whiskey like a man who enjoyed its vile taste, which he did, and felt very well used by the world. This time, even his guns wouldn't be used, no nightriding, no bushwhacking—and, best of all, no suspicion at all. He just had to mail three silly little packages and get paid.

The Kid signaled the barman for another shot and smiled at him. Whoever his employer was didn't matter, either, lots of his employers didn't want him to know them. He chuckled. He'd never hounded one for silent-money yet; he hadn't ever stayed in one spot long enough after a killing to do it.

The night wore on, and the Kid's whiskey roiled slowly through him. That the little packages would obliterate an express rider and his horse were forgotten already. Why should he worry? Every pony rider he'd ever known had taken on the haul because the gent lived on excitement. Few of them ever made a career out of it; they rode until the thrill was gone, then drifted on looking for new horizons to conquer. The Kid had even known renegades who had ridden the express trails for a lark—until they got bored and robbed themselves.

It was whiskey, and the Kid had another one, then more. Dimly he listened to two narrow-shouldered riders around the bend of the bar, talking. He looked casually at them and wanted to laugh. One was the pony rider who was to take out the dawn mail. He was talking with another rider, a lean-built, heavily-muscled man with a sprinkling of silver over his ears. There was a hard-to-describe something about the two men that marked them as brothers.

The Kid squinted over the rim of his glass. That the rider had a brother was important. A man wanted to know

such things in advance, because the brother surely would nose around after the rider was blown up. He nodded slightly to himself, smugly. He was smart; damned smart. It made him feel good to know about the brother. Nobody'd ever catch the Canada Kid off-guard, not by a damned sight. Too smart. The riders were talking again. It was the younger one, he who would take out the dawn pouches. The Kid listened.

"If Lewton had kept his schedules, this outfit from outside wouldn't never have tried for the franchise with the government."

The rider with grey over his ears nodded and shrugged. "No; likely not. But the thing is, Ab, he didn't, and the government's interested in seeing a dependable job done. Now this Steuben hombre comes along, makes a play for the mail contract, and us riders got to keep the schedules for Lewt or he'll lose out."

THE KID had it then; he was as sharp drunk, as he was sober. The local pony express line owner wasn't keeping up his schedules as he was supposed to when he carried the government mail, and some other hombre wanted the mail contract. That was it. Maybe it had been this Steuben hombre who had talked to him through the wall; probably was. The Kid grinned secretively at his glass of whiskey. He wanted to laugh out loud, but he just stood like an owl, blinking at the two riders, then dropped his glance to the drink.

"Well, Ab. I reckon it's time for you to head down to the station and get set up."

"Yeah," the younger man said dryly. "I reckon." He started to turn away from the bar with reluctance on his face. "What're you riding today, Norm?"

"Eleven-thirty. If you don't get back from Mineral Wells, stick around and I'll meet you over there." The Kid snickered on that one, they'd never meet anywhere—unless it was over the Great Divide.

"Seguro," Ab said. "Adios, chief." Norman Vail watched Ab shove through the men and clear the door, before he turned back to his beer. It was then, too, that he noticed the two-gun man around the end of the bar from him. He watched the man's pale, chilly eyes with their flicker of inner amusement, twirling the freshly filled whiskey glass, then his glance passed on.

The *Drover* was packed, still, although it was close to four in the morning. Norm saw Al Lewton down the line and sighed even as he saw Lewt wink at him and start through the crowd with his flushed look and genial eyes.

Al Lewton owned the mail franchise. Everyone in Shaster called him Lewt, although Al was more common. Lewt drank too much, and loafed the same way, he had four riders—including the Vail boys—and he let them make his living for him. He was one of those swell hombres who would do anything for anyone, but wouldn't run his own business even though he was facing ruin—which it was if this newcomer, Kurt Steuben, got the franchise away from him.

"Howdy Norm. Didn't see you down here." Norman looked into the pleasant grey eyes with their bloodshot whites and smiled dourly. It was hard not to like Lewt, even when you were maddest at him.

"No, I don't reckon you did, Lewt. You've been pretty busy taking on a load."

Lewt tossed his head sideways and made the peculiar little upflung motion of his left hand, as he always did when he was shuntling aside a minor annoyance. "No. Not really, Norm. Just getting this damned early morning cold out of my bones." He saw a sharp re-

ply coming and forestalled it quickly. "Has Ab gone out yet?"

"No; he just left here a few minutes ago. Don't worry, Lewt. Ab'll keep the schedule. He's dependable."

Lewt leaned sideways on the bar and shot a look away from his rider. "Yeah," he said, "you and Ab're my best riders. Can't understand why Slab and Buck have so much trouble keeping the schedule." He looked up at Norm expectantly, but the tanned face was impassive. There was no answer coming, Lewt knew it. He shrugged and turned back to the bar moodily. Norm looked at the shorter man and wanted to brace him good about furnishing poor stock, and never being around to make the riders start early enough to compensate for trouble. But all he actually said was, "Don't lay it *all* on the riders, Lewt."

Lewt got it all right, and it rankled; but he didn't answer right away. Just made that little motion with his left hand and forced up a smile. "Buy you a drink, Norm?"

THEY HAD one drink together, then Norm left to get some sleep before he took out the eleven-thirty pouches. He was washing the dust and sweat off his face and neck at the room he and Ab shared at the Lincoln House, when someone rapped sharply on the door. Norm looked out from behind the threadbare towel. Dawn was sending pink banners across the world that softened and lightened the hardness around his eyes and the set, unflinching line of his mouth. He tossed the towel down, crossed over and swung the door inward.

"Morning, Norman."

He smiled down at the pug-nosed, round faced girl. He'd known Lewt's daughter, Agatha, for two years—ever since he and Ab had ridden into Shaster, signed on as express riders and settled at the Lincoln House. She was small sturdy and cute, with her swept-back hair of shimmering copper, and tawny, gold-flecked eyes over the saddle of freckles that bridged her nose. Norm had a secret longing, too. Had had it, in fact, for over a year—but Aggy wasn't over twenty, at the most; besides, she was so little and young looking he'd always thought of her as being altogether too young for a man past thirty.

" 'Morning, Aggy. What's got you up before breakfast?"

"Can I come in?"

Norman stared at her u n e a s i l y. There were conventions at the Lincoln House. Not that he cared for *them,* but, supposing someone saw her in his room? His smile died uncomfortably.

"Well—I reckon, Aggy, but you know you shouldn't." The startled look that flashed over her face struck him. "Well—it's not that *I* mind, Aggy; it's just that—"

"Oh—stop being an old prune." She put a small hand against his chest and pushed him lightly back, sidled around him, closed the door and stood with her back against it, hands behind her, looking up at him. Norm ran a nervous hand through his hair, acutely conscious of Ab's un-made bed. He had been after Ab for twenty-years to pick up after himself; he avoided her eyes.

"Norm?"

"Yes?"

"Look at me." He looked, blush and all. There was something in her direct gaze, in the somber depths of her eyes, that he had never seen there before. All of a sudden she looked like a mature, grown woman, to him, old enough for him, finally. A little pink tongue darted over the fullness of her beautiful mouth and flashed back out of sight again. "Norm—you're my ideal of a man; did you know that?"

It completely startled him. Aggy was very forthright, he knew, and looked right at a person when she talked to them. A little opinionated, too, perhaps; but he'd never suspected

her of having the courage to come right out and talk like that to a man. He gathered a big, deep breath and made a shaky smile down at her.

"I'm glad you said that, Aggy. Y'see, for over a year now I've been thinking about you. I'm in—"

"Wait, Norm. Don't say anything until I'm through talking." Her eyes held his in an unblinking, wide-eyed stare. "It's about Ab; he's dead. He's never coming back to you. He's met with an accident about three miles south of town on the Mineral Wells road. No one knows what happened. Even his horse, Norman, it's just blown all to pieces. Some Mormon freighters found them. Sheriff Rocco and Lewt and Doctor Purdy have gone out to get him—with a wagon."

SHE TOOK a hesitant step toward him and stopped. A strange look was in his face. A look of horror, disbelief—and something else, too, that she'd never seen in anyone's face before. It was the last unknown look that stopped her.

"What happened, Aggy?"

She was still clenching one hand in the palm of the other, behind her back; the fingers were slippery with cold sweat. "No one knows, Norman. He and the horse, both, were scattered all over—like maybe a band of Apaches had caught them."

"Scalped, Aggy?"

She shook her head. "The Mormons said not. They also said his gun was lying there, unfired. Oh, Norman—"

"Aggy—thanks for coming up; go now, will you?" His eyes came down off the door behind her and looked into her face. She nodded and left. Norman sat down on Ab's un-made bed. He was still sitting there, an hour later, when Sheriff Rocco—a chubby, moon faced man with no hair and enormous, hound-dog eyes—came in and sat down beside him.

"Can't tell you much, Norm. Whatever in hell he was hit with must've been bigger'n any express rifle I ever seen. Gawd! It blew him and the horse all to hell." He didn't tell Norm they had never found Ab's right foot at all. "Doc Purdy's got him now, Norm. He's going to put him in that real fine carved coffin that Messican built for the wife he thought was dead, and turned out to have runned off with some other Messican."

Norman hadn't spoken and Rocco got up uncomfortably, turning his hat and looking down at the ashen faced brother, then walked to the door.

"S' long, Norman."

- 2 -

NORM DIDN'T see the remains; Doctor Purdy, lean and cadaverous, a taciturn, aloof man, had sealed Ab in the handsome coffin. "I want him buried on that little knoll up behind the cemetery, Doc. You know, up where those Cottonwoods are."

Purdy pursed his lips. "That ground's owned by Burt Hogan, Norm. I'm sorry, we can find a nice spot—"

"No." He stood looking down at the carved box. "Let it ride, Doc. I've got to carry the pouches, anyway. When I get back, I'll go to the bank and see if I can talk Hogan out of a small piece on the knoll." Purdy nodded soberly and Norm left.

Lewt met him at the corral. There was a strained, flat-boned look to his face. "Norm—I was going to get Slag—"

"No, Lewt." I'll take 'em." He walked over, took the sweat stained pouches off Lewt's arm, went back and took the reins of the saddled horse from old man Murphy, the

hostler, swung up, nodded brusquely and loped out of the yard. Old man Murphy was the first to speak after Norman had ridden off.

"I knowed he do it; I just knowed it." He threw a guarded look at Lewt. "You'd do better if you'd hunt up another 'un like him—or even two, now. You'd have nothing to worry about schedules, then."

Lewt's problems were bowing him down and the old hostler's innuendo angered him in an exasperated, harrassed way. He turned and glared at the grizzled old man's face, with its leathery hide and watery eyes, flagged his hand irritably and spoke. "Whatever got Ab, could get anyone; even Norm."

Murphy was walking toward the office when he answered. "No it wouldn't; it'll never get Norm Vail. He ain't the careless kind." He let the door squeek closed behind him. "You'll see, Lewt."

Lewt was still standing in the yard behind the office, near the corrals, when Buck Winters and Slag Garret came up. He squinted to his other two riders without any welcome in his face. Slag's wind-whipped face had a rosy, whiskey-colored tint to it. He was thin as a rail sideways, with buck teeth and a pockmarked face. He said nothing, just inclined his head stiffly.

Buck Winters was blond, graceful like a cougar, and with wide, alert eyes. He hadn't been in Shaster long, and never mentioned anything about himself. Lewt was used to that. Riding overland express was an exacting, dangerous job; he took what riders came along, no questions asked. Buck looked at the split-log saddle rack, saw that Norm's rig was gone and raised his eyebrows. "Slag and me come over to take it for him, Lewt." "Thanks, boys, only he wouldn't hear of it. Lit out a few minutes ago."

Slag started a cigaret. "You get what was left of the pouches. off'n Ab?"

"Yeah; but there wasn't much worth picking up and what there was, was torn all to hell." Lewt shook his head and winced. Ab had been carrying two government drafts for the Indian agency employees. They'd have to be reported destroyed and re-issued —a lengthy routine that'd make the agency men cuss.

LEWT TURNED away from the office, and headed up toward the saloon. Another failure for the Shaster-Mineral Wells Mail Express. He needed something, quick, to help him over the thoughts that were damned up behind his eyes. Buck and Slag watched him go, apathetically, then they turned and entered the little office, always kept sweating hot by the old hostler and his wood stove that roared at three every morning and didn't die out until after midnight.

They stood around the office in silence and thought about Norm, even as he loped into Mineral Wells eleven minutes ahead of schedule and tossed the old pouches onto the table of the party who made the next lap with them. He left the office hurriedly, before the men asked him anything about the news at the other end. Mineral Wells was like Shaster—only it had a newer, more civic minded cleanliness about it. Norm went directly to the *Boar's Nest Saloon* and got a bottle; then he went directly to the dingy little barn Lewt maintained at the Mineral Wells end of the line, crawled into the loose hay and drank himself into a stupor.

He didn't have to be back to Shaster until eleven the following day—which was well, because it was fully midnight before he was able to travel.

Mineral Wells, except for the roaring saloons, was dead to the world when the whiskey-stubbled rider, slouching and bleary eyed rode out of

town headed back toward Shaster. His clothes were dark with dirt and neglect, and smelled of spilled whiskey. He rode slowly, like a man burdened with great sorrow, or a bad illness. The night closed in around him until he and the darkness were alone in the still eeriness of the brooding land.

Norm knew he'd pass the four o'clock rider somewhere between Shaster and Mineral Wells. It was Ab's old run. He wondered if the new schedule that Lewt would have to work out, would put Slag or Buck Winters in Ab's boots. He hoped it would be Buck. There was something he didn't like about Slag, he didn't want to see Slag riding Ab's run.

The night chill hardened the marrow in Norm's bones and his muscles stiffened under its penetrating force. He rode among the shadows like a wraith; then, suddenly, he straightened in the saddle. Gradually he sank back down. Not AB. He'd forgotten; that was all over. Ab would never ride out early, like now, and lope back into Mineral Springs with his brother any more, ribbing the younger man as they plunged through the gloom about being behind schedule. Ab was dead. This would be Buck or Slag.

Norm could barely make out the rider, 'way off, coming down the trace. He was squinting to see who it was, when all of a sudden the whole upper end of the world along the sallow horizon came apart in a gigantic sunburst of deafening, blinding, thunder. His horse snorted wildly and rammed to a stiff-legged halt, trembling.

Norm was too horrified and startled to move. He listened to the echoes roll and rumble down the range. The oncoming rider was nowhere in sight. He had disappeared in the explosion, as though the earth had opened up and swallowed him. With a hoarse shout, Norm ran in the spurs and forced his panicky, shying horse up to where the blood and intestines and warm, quivering flesh was scattered over the earth on both sides of the roadway. In a second his head was clear. He swung down and stared at the wreckage; and it was then that he saw the knee-high, kid-inlaid boot with a splintered shinbone sticking out of it and knew who the rider had been. Buck Winters!

SHERIFF ROCCO wrinkles his nose at the acrid, sickening smells that came from Norm. Raw whiskey, rancid human sweat, horse sweat and blood. He stared in fascination at the ruined sixgun Norm had tossed on his desk. He didn't say a word until the express rider had finished his grisly tale, then he ran a hand over his pale dome.

"G'almighty, Norman. Are you *sure* you seen this. I mean—you've been drinking; and, well, after what happened to Ab—"

"I know what I saw and I'm telling you the truth." Norm's swollen, bloodshot eyes were shooting sparks. "Take your damned buggy and go out there, you'll see for yourself."

The sheriff got up, still frowning. "I reckon I'll have to." He looked up. "You going back to the Lincoln House?"

"Yes, going to have a bath and a shave. I'll be back here tonight."

Rocco nodded thoughtfully. "All right, Norm. When I get back—" He watched the rider walk down the plankwalk toward the hotel and wagged his head sympathetically. It sounded crazy, in a way—but in another way, it'd sure solve what had happened to Ab. A darned blow-up of some kind.

Sheriff Rocco drew in a big breath and let it come out like a sigh. He'd never heard of such a thing. A rider and his horse blown up while they were riding along. No drygulcher; no sputtering fuse glowing red in the night, no warning at all, in fact. Just

loping along with the mail one minute and blown sky high and four ways from the middle, the next. It was crazy. He walked out of the office with a grimace. Six months to go, then his term was up and anyone damned fool enough to take it, could have the job! Double damned if he'd run again; nossir!

After Norm had cleaned up, he went to the bank and saw Burt Hogan. The banker was a pursed-lip, florid man with a white celluloid collar and a handsome Prince Albert coat that made an average man uneasy in his presence. He sucked in his mouth a little tighter and gazed perplexedly at the floor in front of Norm's chair.

"You put me in an extremely trying sport, Norman. Extremely. I—we—Miz' Hogan and myself feel that the knoll should be kept sacred. It's a sort of sentiment we both have. When we're—ah—gone, Norman, we'd both like to be able to look down on Shaster from up there." He shrugged his embarrassment. "Watch this little town grow with the country, sort of. Grow and expand and become a part of the new West, Norman." He leaned back in the chair and wagged his head. "I'm awfully sorry, Norman."

Norm had never liked the banker, and didn't now, he got up dumbly and nodded. For a short time he didn't say anything, then he raised his grey eyes and looked solemnly at Hogan. "All right, Burt; it's your ground I reckon. Adios." He turned abruptly, his spurs ringing softly in the quiet office, and walked out.

Back at Doctor Purdy's, Norm made arrangements to have Ab buried on a little hillock southeast of the regular boothill. He offered to pay Doc, but Purdy wouldn't hear of it.

"No, Norman; under the circumstances I couldn't. Not this time. The casket didn't cost me anything, either. Just forget it. The boys just delivered Buck Winters' remains. These are two jobs I haven't any stomach for. Awful thing. Awful."

NORM WENT to the *Drover's Saloon,* nodded to several men he knew and ordered a beer. He was sipping it in his usual spot when he saw the two-gun man around the bar, by the back-wall. The man had even more of a tincture of a smile in his glassy eyes than he'd had the night before. Their eyes crossed casually, then Norm noticed the well-dressed stranger farther along, in among a bunch of alkali dusted Circle P riders just in off the roundup and getting the scorch out of their throats.

The *Drover* was noisy and smelly as usual. Norm was turning the double killing over in his mind when Lewt walked in and elbowed up beside him. He ordered a whiskey then faced his rider. "Norm; I'm suspending operations."

Norm grunted. "That's no solution, Lewt."

"No; I know that—but whoever's responsible for these killings will try again. If they want to disrupt my schedules so's I can't deliver, then I'll quit. But, by gawd, I'll not send another man to his death."

"Then," Norm said softly, enunciating very clearly, "you'll never send out anoter rider, Lewt. Never." He finished his beer and set the mug down with a hard slam. "If we don't carry the mail at all, t'morrow, you know what'll happen. Your franchise'll be revoked within the day by the government men at the capitol. That's exactly what someone wants—this Steuben outfit, for instance. You quit, Lewt, and we'll not only be out of business, but we'll never know who blew up Ab and Buck; or how." His eyes were hostile. "You either let me take the mail in the morning, on Ab's old run, or I'll pretend I'm packing 'em and ride out on schedule alone. See?"

Lewt shook his head vigorously and slapped the bartop. "Not on your life,

Norm; not on you goddamned life. Them pouches can lie there until Steuben comes and gets 'em. I'll not send another man out until this blowing-up business is figured out and done away with."

"Who's sending who to *whose* death?"

They both turned and looked at Sheriff Rocco. Lewt gestured irritably toward Norm. "He wants to take the pouches tomorrow on Ab's run. I won't let him, there'll be no more killings on my runs. Not as long as I've got anything to say about it. To hell with the franchise." He rapped the bar. "Three more whiskeys, Elmer."

Sheriff Rocco pushed in between the two men. "You boys see that fancy-dan down the line a little? In among them Circle P riders?" They both looked and nodded. Rocco made a wry face. "That's Kurt Steuben; he's been in with Burt Hogan most of the afternoon."

Rocco reached out quickly and grabbed Norm's arm as the express rider started away from the bar. "Wait a minute, you damned fool, let me finish. I went over and asked Burt what Steuben was doing in Shaster. He didn't like me poking into his affairs until I told him, by gawd, I'd damn well poke into anyone's affairs, when I figured they were my business, too." Rocco downed the liquor, made a tart face and went on. "Burt told me Steuben had made a big deposit so's he'd have cash money when he took over the mail franchise."

This time it was Lewt he had to grab. "Dammit, y'fools. Hear me out." He motioned to the barman to bring them another round of the same. "I don't like Steuben's looks, either. He's a slicker if I ever seen one, but he ain't in this thing alone. believe me. This is his first visit to Shaster, yet two of his opposition's riders have been killed 'thout him being around." He looked up quickly at both men. "You get it? He's got the real killer right here in Shaster, and that hombre's the one we want. You go work him over and we'll likely never get to the real man. See?"

NORM LOOKED up dourly, glancing along the bar with a pained expression on his face. He only half noticed that the two-gun man was no longer in his place at the end of the bar, around the corner from them.

"Yeah. Reckon you're right at that, sheriff. This Steuben—if he's the one—has got a hired killer cached here in town, someplace."

Sheriff Rocco nodded, down the next shot of whiskey, made the same, tart expression and spat on the sawdusted floor. "Yeah."

Lewt drank his down neat and looked belligerently at both of them. "All right; Steuben can have the damned franchise. Whether he's got a killer cached here or not, don't change a thing with me. No more mail goes out until this blowing-up business is settled, and that's final."

Norm frowned at Lewt. "Have it your way, then, Lewt; but like I told you, I'm riding out of Shaster in the morning just like I was carrying the mail. Whoever's doing this will see me go and try to blow *me* up, too, maybe—and that's what I want. Just one chance to see this dynamiter, or whatever he is, just one look!"

Lewt started to protest when the sheriff interrupted. "Hold on a second, Lewt, he's got a good idea. I'll trail him. You come along, too; I'll deputise you. By gawd we'll get this drygulcher."

The bartender was looking at them questioningly, but Norm shook his head when Lewt opened his mouth to order another one. He shrugged and moved off, ignoring the express line owner's look. Lewt frowned, turned to protest, saw the stern look in Norm's face and swallowed feebly in silence.

"Get some sleep then, you hombres,

because I'll be riding at four sharp."

Lewt was adamantly shaking his head when Norm left the saloon. "He *won't* carry the mail, sheriff; he damned well won't. I'll not have another man blowed up. Nossir. Two's more'n enough."

Rocco nodded indulgently and looked up at the battered clock over the bar. He noticed the time—five o'clock, straight up—even as he heard the muffled report of a shot somewhere out in the far edge of Shaster. He frowned at Lewt. "You go on home and get some supper, Lewt; you've already had more liquor than you can carry. I gotta go see who just shot who." He started for the door with a frown. "See you at three-thirty at the corrals. Adios."

Lewt went home, growling adamantly that no one was going to take those damned pouches out of the safe, for love or money. No damned body; not even the sheriff. They were an invitation to death and he'd not stand for it at all. At all!

Aggy frowned irritably at her father. Since the franchise trouble had come up, he had been drinking more than she'd ever seen him drink before. Almost every day he came to supper smelling of whiskey. She pointed imperiously at the laden table and said one scorching word.

"Eat!"

Lewt nodded and sat down avoiding her face, his anger diluted with shame.

- 3 -

THE KID sat sideways on the chair with the same half-amused, half self-conscious smile on his face. He hadn't been there long when he had heard someone moving around in the adjoining room. A chair was drawn up close to the wall and a muffled voice came reverberatingly through the wood and paper to him.

"Well? What is it?" The kid told of the conversation he'd heard between Norm, Lewt, and the sheriff. For a while the voice didn't come back; then it spoke slowly, as though the man in the other room was thinking as he spoke. "You mailed the last package yet?"

"Hell, no; you said three days between 'em. Won't mail this last one until tonight, so's it'll go out at dawn." There was a short pause. "By the way, I got another thousand coming; slip it under the door." He heard the chair scrape back and the unknown employer walked over and pushed money under the door. He resumed his seat and allowed the Kid a few seconds to get back to his.

"It's all right if Norman Vail rides out on a fluke; in fact, I like it that way. Naturally, he won't be blown up, and that'll confuse the sheriff even more. Maybe they'll even send the real pouches next time." The hidden man chuckled dryly. "Then another rider'll die mysteriously, and Lewton will quit." The chuckle grew into a full-sized laugh. "I can just see Rocco's face when he's asked to explain what's happening—and can't."

The voice changed abruptly and took on a muffled crispness. "Kid—you stick around town a little while after you've mailed the third package, tonight and keep your ears open. If you have anything, get in touch with me; use the same signal."

"Sure," the Kid said, "but not for love, amigo."

The voice sounded a trifle irritated. The chair squeaked like a man was flagging his arm or fidgetting a little. "All right; anytime you signal me with good information, I'll chuck you an extra two-hundred. All right?"

The Kid got up and stretched. "I reckon. Adios."

It was dark and chilly when the sheriff met Norm and Lewt. They exchanged glances and Norm shrugged.

"I might as well take the damned pouches, Lewt."

"No, by gawd; I said no and I meant it. There'll be no more—"

"Oh—go to hell!" Norm swung away and spurred down through town. Somehow, word of his going had spread through Shaster and women in wrappers stood beside their night-capped husbands, solemnly watching the express rider thunder out of Shaster. They didn't see Lewt and Rocco swing off toward the range, paralleling Norm's course. A few heard the dull rumble of running horses, but not many.

Norm rode squint-eyed and with his cocked .44 in his fist. He didn't want to die, but he had no particular fear of it either—not if he got in just one shot as the man who'd killed his brother. He rode all the way to Mineral Springs, slowly relaxing, until he reined up thoughtfully and sat perfectly still in sight of town, near the end of the run. He was still sitting like a statue when Lewt and the sheriff thundered up. Suddenly he turned toward them and put his horse into a long lope.

"I believe I've got it, boys; come on." They rode beside him shouting and scowling, but Norman Vail rode in an absorbed, preoccupied manner until they reined up again in front of the Shaster office of the pony express. He swung down and dashed inside with both Rocco and Lewt at his heels. Old man Murphy stared sleepily at the trio. "Murph—fetch me the mail bags, will you?"

MURPHY looked questioningly at Lewt, who started to shake his head, then shrugged and nodded. Murphy opened the old safe, raised the pouches out and slid them over the table to Norm, who unbuckled the straps and pulled out the envelopes and packages. For a long time no one spoke, then Norm picked out the five packages in the load and walked toward the door.

Lewt was looking up at Norm with complete wonder. "Just what in hell's wrong with you?"

The rider turned back in the door. "Come on with me; you'll see whether I'm right or crazy." He turned and walked out of the office, past the corrals and out to where the rangeland rolled for miles, until it was lost in the early dawn, and stopped. He faced them. Old Murphy was clearing his throat lustily when Norm spoke to the sheriff.

"I have an idea. Maybe it's crazy. Probably is. But—no one tried to blow *me* up, when I rode Ab's run." He held out the packages toward Murphy. "You know who left each of these packages, Murph?"

"Sure," the old man answered. He started to point to each one when Norman cut him off.

"Never mind right now, Murph. I'll only want to know about *one* of 'em—if I'm right." He smiled wryly. "And if I'm wrong I want you boys to forget I ever did this." He swung his arm and threw the first package as far as he could heave it.

Lewt gasped in horror. "Hey! You damned fool! That might be somebody's damned watch—or something."

Norm's arm went back and forward with the second package and Lewt started to swear and walk toward him. He drew back and let the third one go with a great toss. Lewt was almost beside him when the bundle struck the ground and a huge geyser of earth and flame leaped at them like a miniature boreallis.

Sheriff Rocco swore in a sudden falsetto eruption and threw himself face down; Norm fell against Lewt and both crumpled under the concussion. For a brief second, only old Murphy was still standing—then he staggered back and buckled forward, shaken with fear and too petrified to even swear. Norm was looking into the comprehending eyes of the sheriff and Lewt

when they heard the cries of the townsmen coming toward them.

Norm got up with a harsh smile on his face. "All right; you get it now."

Lewt nodded, still speechless. Rocco turned quickly to Murphy. "You know whose package that was, Murphy?" The old man forced his awed glance back to the sheriff. He tried to speak, but no words came out. "Dammit, Murphy; speak up. We got to move fast or the hombre who mailed that thing'll take out of Shaster like a scalded cat. Hell—it riled the whole damned town. Who mailed the thing, Murphy?"

The old man's voice came back in a rasping croak. His body was still shaking. "Stranger. Tallish, hard-looking feller; 'little younger'n Norm. Wore two guns and had a sort of smile on his face. Brown Stetson. Work shirt like—"

"Come on!" Norm was starting away. Lewt and Rocco exchanged glances and ducked through the crowd that was descending on old Murphy, screaming questions and imprecations in the same breath, some badly frightened, others uneasy and wondering, while a few were just plain angry.

Murphy's color came back slowly. It had been thirty years since he'd had so many people asking his opinion about anything. He appreciated his position and grandly arose to the occasion, after making two separate cowboys run back to the Drover for bottle for him. With all the talking coming up, Murphy didn't want to risk losing his voice again.

THE CANADA KID heard the explosion from his stand in the *Drover's Saloon*. He was rigid with bewilderment for several seconds; he was almost caught up in the contagion of terror that swept Shaster and emptied the Drover of everyone but one old codger too deaf to know what happened. He smiled, then poured himself a free drink from a bottle the bartender had forgotten to put under the bar, and his smile became a laugh.

The damned package had blown up in the express office. It had blown the whole shebang to hell; everything. That was better yet. Not just one rider, this time—the whole lock stock and barrel. He was laughing fit to kill now. The sound erupted from the broad expanse of his chest, siphoned through his throat and rumbled out of his mouth. Tears ran down his cheeks. The sound rode and fell and tapered off, then rise again with fresh impetus and rocked the bottles on the backbar.

It was wonderful. *Muy bonito*. He downed his drink and poured another, staring affectionately at the bottle, downed that one and had to hang onto the bar for support as the roll of laughter came again. His head was down, eyes closed tightly with their load of laughter and tears. He opened them finally and the laughter died away slowly, gradually, raggedly. His eyes were focused on a blunt-toed pair of boots. He could even see the engravings on the spur-strap buckles. Boots right in front of him and not moving. Boots he'd never seen before, but, right then, the Canada Kid sobered considerably.

"Funny, isn't it? Real funny."

The Kid straightened up with a jerk. He knew that edge in a voice when he heard it. Fighting, killing edge. His old confidence, shaken for a second, returned. This was something he understood. He looked from the tanned rider in front of him, to the sheriff off to one side and the short, pudgy man nearby. He knew then, that somehow, they'd figured it all out. He smiled again, but this was a different smile—a contemptuous, scornful one. The kind he used unconsciously when he faced men who fought for ideals instead of gold.

"Yeah. It's goddam funny. What about it?"

"This!"

The Kid was too close to the man

he was almost against the wall. He tried for his guns, but he had to lean a little and when he did, the bony fist crashed into his mouth and knocked his head wildly backwards. He dimly felt the wall crack into his head, then someone must have shot out the lights.

THE KID was coming back from a long way off, and automatically felt for his guns. Empty holsters brought him around with a cold shiver down his spine; he knew fear, then.

"Who hired you to blow them up?"

The Kid opened his eyes and tasted the ruin of his mouth. A big open hand struck him—hard. Agony shot up through his head from the bruised flesh. "Who gave you those packages? Who paid you? Speak up, gunman, or. I'll kick you to death." Again the hand lashed out like a cat-o'-nine-tails. The Kid couldn't take any more of it; his body ached and writhes in agony and his face was a feverish mass of purple flesh. He forced his eyes open and stared in dread at Norman; he saw that the sheriff was no longer there. The hand was moving up again.

"No. No; I'll tell you. It's some mysterious hombre. I meet him in a room upstairs in the Lincoln House. He sits in one empty room and I sit in the adjoining room. He tells me what he wants through the wall. Honest to gawd, I don't know who he is. Smooth talker. Savvies good English. He give me the three packages. 'Said I was to mail 'em—"

"We've guessed all that. What's in those packages?"

"Hones' to gawd, pardner, I don't know. The hombre who pays me must be a smart feller. Must know chemistry—or something. He's—"

"How do you get to meet him?" Norm asked bluntly.

"Shoot one shot out in back of town right at five o'clock sharp. He'll be in the room in less than an hour after I shoot; that's our signal."

"How much did he pay you?"

"Two-thousand. He said he'd—"

"Take him over to Rocco's office, Lewt. Here," Norm handed Lewt the gunman's two .44s. "Use his own guns on him if he makes a sashay. Shoot low, if you have to shoot. Low and in the center; gutshoot him from behind, Lewt. It'll take him a week to die, that way."

Lewt motioned at the badly-whipped gunman. The Kid went meekly out of the vacated saloon, across the roadway, and into the sheriff's office where Lewt locked him up in the only barred cell in the small building, threw a withering glance at him, and walked back over to the saloon.

- 4 -

NORM WAS pouring a drink when Lewt came in, ludicrous with the two big guns jammed into the waistband of his britches. "Me, too, Norm." The rider hesitated and glowered at Lewt for a moment, then shrugged and poured two glasses. Lewt gulped his liquor and turned as the batwing doors banged inwardly and Sheriff Rocco stalked in with Kurt Steuben, shaken and pale-faced, walking in front of him.

"Steuben—we want to ask you some questions. We—"

"Ask me anything you want to; I'll tell you nothing. Nothing!"

The man was as pale as a ghost, but there was a shade of determination in his eyes that told Norm he could be tortured—killed, even—and still he'd say nothing. Norm rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. Here was one they'd have to sidetrack. He saw the townsmen beginning to trickle back into the saloon and jerked his head at Rocco.

"Come on, Sheriff; let's lock him up."

The crowd was standing around, open-mouthed, staring at them. Sheriff

Rocco frowned. "But Norm; we got to know—"

Norm jostled toward the door and let the interruption drift back over his shoulder. "Come on, dammit; I just thought of something."

Rocco scowled, spun Steuben and gave him a hard push. Silently the three of them crossed the road, ignoring startled pedestrians and put Steuben into the cell with the Canada Kid. Rocco closed the cell door grumpily, locked it and went into the tiny office, slamming the door between his office and the cell.

"Now what kind of an idea you got, Norm?"

"Who owns the Lincoln House?"

Rocco scratched his bald head and replaced his hat. "Damned if I know. Why?"

"Because the clerk at the desk will either know who's got those two vacant rooms rented, or he won't; and if he don't know, then there's only one other soul in Shaster who could use them without the clerk knowing anything about them. The owner. See?"

Rocco looked owlishly at Lewt, who returned the stare. Then they both caught on at the same moment and smiled. Lewt spoke first. "That's right; that's damned well right. Let's go find out."

The clerk at the Lincoln House was Old Man Murphy's son. He listened to Sheriff Rocco's questions, shrugged thoughtfully and scratched his nose. "Ain't nobody got them rooms rented. They're unused because the owner's going to have them painted, and—"

"Who is he?"

"Huh?"

"Who owns the Lincoln House?" Rocco asked, testily. "Your boss—dammit—who is he?"

"Oh. Why, that's Doctor Purdy. He—"

"Let's go." Norm led the exodus. The clerk watched the three of them go with a look of perplexity on his face. He sat down on a high stool and stared after them, still scratching his nose.

NORM WALKED so fast that Lewt had to almost trot to keep up. They barged past astonished townsmen and scarcely noticed the little clutches of men gathered at random, talking among themselves.

Norm didn't knock on the Doctor's door at all; he twisted the knob as if it was Purdy's neck and barged in with a rush that made the doctor, seated at his desk, look up in astonishment, half starting out of his chair. His wide, unblinking stare took in the sheriff and Lewt, as well as Norman. The glance lingered on Lewt seconds longer than on the others. He recognised the two big .44s still rammed into Lewt's waistband. The Canada Kid may not have known his employer, but the doctor had studied the Kid plenty of times over an evening's mug of ale, just to test the Kid; to see if he knew the doctor. He hadn't though.

"Stand up, Doc!"

Purdy didn't move. He had a gun in a shoulder holster and a derringer in the desk drawer. He was enough of a gambler to recognise the odds, though. Norm lunged over the desk, grabbed his coat and yanked him to his feet like he was a small child.

"Why did you do it?"

Purdy was thinking fast. He licked his lips in a maneuver to gain time. Norm's hand flew at him like a whip.

Purdy went over backwards, rolled sideways and streaked for the shoulder holster. He rolled back and started to drag at the gun, then he froze. Norm's gun was cocked and aimed at him from a distance of no more than five feet. They glared. Purdy slowly let his gun drop; Norm lashed out with his boot-toe and sent it spinning.

"I wish to gawd you'd done it, Doc. Get up!" Purdy arose, all the craftiness and fight drained out of him. "Why did you do it?"

"Kurt and I; Kurt Steuben—"

"We know who he is. He's locked up with your two-gun man."

"Both of them? The Canada Kid, too?"

Rocco's sharply indrawn breath broke in before Norm could answer. "The Canada Kid? Is that who that gunman is? The Canada Kid?" The doctor nodded. "Lord almighty! There's close to twelve-thousand dollars on his head."

Purdy nodded again, l i f e l e s s l y. "Steuben and I are partners. We were going to get the franchise from Shaster to Mineral Wells. We've already tentatively bought out the Mineral Wells to the Indian agency line. Lewt wouldn't sell last summer when Kurt sent a man up to talk to him, so we had to make him lose the franchise by not keeping the schedules. Kurt contacted this Canada Kid and sent him up here. I didn't want the Kid to know who I was, so I used to talk to him through a partition in the hotel. I made up three nitroglycerine bombs. I even made little packages for them so's they'd bang against lead weights inside the packages and explode when a horse loped along with them. We needed this line—"

"Shut up! I've heard all I can take." Norm turned to Rocco. "Take him out of here, sheriff, before I kill him."

Rocco nodded understandingly and jerked with his gun toward the door. "Over to my office, Purdy. You got the whole damned length of town to run in, if you want to; I hope to hell you try it."

"I need something to—"

Norm grabbed Lewt's shoulder in an iron grip. "You don't need a damned thing out of there; you need one of Aggy's home-cooked meals. Then, Lewt, you're going to work like you've never worked before. I got a twelve-thousand dollar reward coming to me for the Canada Kid, and I want to buy into your franchise. But first," he dropped Lewt's arm in front of the cottage where Aggy was watching them approach from the porch, "I want to find out something. You stay right here until I come back."

HE LEFT Lewt, puzzled and a little annoyed, making that peculiar motion with his left hand he always made when irritated, and walked up to the porch, stooped, and looked down at Aggy.

"Aggy—it's all settled now. All of it but one thing." He swallowed with difficulty. "You remember what you said in the hotel room? About—about me being your—?"

"Ideal of a man?" She finished for him. "Yes, Norman, I remember. Why?"

"Well—I was wondering if—but of course I'm a lot older than you, and—well—maybe I hadn't ought to embarrass you, Aggy—but—I was thinking—"

"Norman Vail! I never heard anyone take so long to say anything in my life." Her eyes were looking wistfully up into his face. They both heard Lewt blowing his nose lustily, back on the plankwalk. "In fact," Aggy said, "it's taken you over a year, Norman, just to get this much of it said." There were tears stinging her eyes but she was smiling up at him anyway. "Shall I finish it for you?"

"Wish to heck you would, Aggy," Lewt called out loudly, in acute distress. "If I can't get a drink, why then I'd sure like some dinner, anyway."

[*Turn To Page* 30]

It was bad enough that Dolly Seabright and her sons of Temperance had gulled most of Gold Run into taking pledges, and destroyed all the liquor in town. What was worse was Digger John and Dredger Dan finding, when they came back with a new supply, that the Hotel and Saloon had been burned to the ground!

DIGGER JOHN AND THE SONS

by A. A. BAKER

DIGGER JOHN seemed tireless breaking trail ahead of the mules. His webbed snowshoes smashed through the crust, and the patient animals studiously put their small hoofs into the pits Digger's weight drove in the Sierra snow.

A half-moan reached the plodding man and he halted, slapping each snow-studded animal as it passed. Digger smiled, sniffing the rank odor of sweaty hair, raising in warm steam from the animals as they passed. He unwrapped the shawl holding his soggy black hat on his bushy head, then dug heavy fingers into his itching red beard.

Now he could hear better—shouted moans from his partner, Dredger Dan, who limped behind the last mule. Digger concentrated and listened tensely. Yes, there it was, the smooth gurgle of filled whiskey barrels. Red liquor sloshing in the cased bottles; mellowing. Digger grinned. Double run liquor, jostling to ripe nectar that would slip smoothly past the Gold Run drinkers' lips—and there were twenty five mule loads!

"Confound you, Digger," whined Dan as he drew abreast of the mountain man. "Can't we camp, dry out our clothes'n get some grub into our bellies?"

"Why, glad to, Dan." Digger's eyes gleamed like wind whipped coals. "We'll fix us a lean-to an' be outa this snow. Hunker down all winter, even; we'll break out a bottle jest to..."

"No sir, John!" squealed Dan. "When we left Sacramento, you promised. We made us a deal. We'd get this here cargo into Gold Run, an' we'd have no likker till we unloaded. I *know* what'd happen if you was turned loose with two thousand dollars worth of whiskey. An'," Dredger Dan worked his stubby fingers out of his wool mittens, "John, it ain't only you..." Dredger Dan worked the saliva onto lips that were cold-seared, then spat. "Now me—if ever we give in an' took jest one drink..." Dan's eyes popped then narrowed with the thought. He braced his fat little body, shrugged his heavy shoulders in the striped mackinaw. "I'm interested; let's get along!"

"The Sons of Temperance broke every bottle and barrel of liquor in town."

Digger dug snow out of his sideburns and blew speculatively on his numbed hands. Fourteen days they had been on the trail. They had forded the surging American River twice, and floundered across the canyon of the racing Bear. They'd slept under mildewed tarps, chilled. But Dan had remained stubborn. Not one bottle had been touched; not a single dram was allowed to gurgle from the casks.

Now was the time for a nip. It was worth an argument. Digger John swelled his cheeks and drew the cold air into his lungs. "I ain't goin' no farther," he grunted impassively. "I ain't puttin' another of my little frozen paddies one more step ahead!" he glowered down at Dan.

"Blast you, D i g g e r!" Dredger wailed. "We *ain't* gonna open a bottle! You can stay here, I'm takin' them mules in, alone."

"I COULD bust you on the snoot." ruminated Digger. "I could tear off your head. You think anyone'd blame me? No Miner's Court in the Sierras'd go against that. One winter," Digger added, "Carson City was starvin'. They was a pack train come in, loaded half an' half with whiskey and flour. They liked to hang that teamster—wastin' pack mule space bringin' in flour."

"All right, Digger," Dan found his voice. "You can start tearin', but long's I'm alive, you ain't crackin' a jug—not one single jug. We come down outa Gold Run," he reminded the huge miner, "after Dolly Seabright, an' her Sons of Temperance, busted every bot-

tle an' barrel in town. Winter'd come. Freighters had give up hauling. The only chance we had to get winter likker in was to pack it in ourselves. You was fired up then, you was goin' to show them Sons of Temperance! Gonna show Dolly Seabright. You was gonna see to it that the river miners was goin' to get their whiskey. Now—you want to back off. After I blew in ever' dime I could come by to buy this cargo."

"But jest *one* slug," moaned Digger. He knew that Dredger Dan was right. Dolly Seabright had moved cleverly. A fine-looking blonde woman, she was, and she'd spent the summer gathering recruits, giving the pledge in her lavender scented headquarters. Gathered converts who seemed paralyzed by her limpid blue eyes. But the citizens had not been completely captured. While they had avoided *Dan's Saloon,* they had been stopping in the Mercantile Drug counter for their morning dram. Dolly had suffered gently with this male defection—until the first heavy snow.

Then with the fury of a Tarter with burrs in his pants, she had struck. Leading her fanatics, she'd swept through Gold Run and broached ever ounce of liquor. She'd doomed the town to dry gullets through the long, damp winter. And Digger had joined with Dan to bring in the winter's supply. Now he was acting like a heel.

"Dan," Digger reached out a contrite arm to pat the fat shoulder "You're..."

But Dan misunderstood. He drew back and crashed against the rump of a steaming mule. The mule bucked and Dan landed in the cradle formed by the animal's cocked legs. The saloon owner catapulted against a snow covered limb. The mule, delighted at the maneuver, gazed around and spotted Digger bent over and scraping snow aside to uncover Dan. It took aim and let fly. Digger vaulted into a manzanita bush and was caught by the prickly branches. Dredger Dan poked his head out of his snow pack, his red hat looking like a cherry atop whipped cream. Digger lay where he landed and hooted at his glowering partner. Dan, seeing the crisis had passed, smiled. Then both men were roaring, helpless in their laughter to emerge from the snow. The mule brayed, shook his head until the harness bells jangled.

"All right..." Digger coughed the words. "You win, Dan, we'll save the whiskey until we reach Gold Run."

"Right, Dig. Then Dolly Seabright an' her brother better look out. The river miners'll be in. They'll help against them Sons of Temperance. This cargo will stock up the Hotel saloon—enough to last all winter. We'll be warm..." Dan looked estatic. "There'll be warm blankets; we'll light the stove in every room. There'll be hot shavin' water, dry clothes." He played his trump. "An' we'll hold a party for Gold Run, Dig. We'll knock in the head of some of them kegs..."

"Oh, don't paint no more pictures!" Digger swallowed saliva that filled his mouth. "Let's jest get goin'."

IT WAS dawn when they topped Cold Spring Mountain. Ice crystals flowed over the bowl holding the town of Gold Run. Smoke, grayed in the dawning sun drifted slackly up from the houses. Lower town was bustling, filled now for the winter by the river miners. Men drawn lean and taut by the cold water, ready to relax through the winter in the confines of this mountain town. To drool over canned oysters, and smoked hams that were crusted with sorgum or glazed with wild honey. To don fresh new socks or wilt under the steaming lather of a barber-shop bath and shave. To enjoy their summer's gold in Dredger Dan's *Hotel and Saloon.*

Digger John and Dan halted to drink in the scene. It had been a rough trip for the hotel man. His face sagged, and with eyes that burned from his bearded face, he glared out past the wagging

ears of the lead mule. His gaze started at the bottom of Main Street. There were the miner's cabins, snow crusted but where they should be. Then there was the Feed Barn, its open doors steaming with vapor raised by warm animals. Next was the Mercantile Store and, of course, Digger John's flat adobe. And all the other houses... *but there was no hotel!*

The entire building, wide porch, wide windows, the encircling balcony with its fancy gingerbread canopy—*all were gone.* Left as a sentinel was the leaning brick chimney, glaring morosely down on the black ashes the snow could not conceal!

"It's burnt!", Dan cried, and it was the cry of a man mortally wounded. He leaned his sagging arms on the lead mule and wept. The mule brayed in championship of the miseries of the man, Dredger.

"Yeah—yeah, Dan..." Digger kicked at the snow, his head lowered in compassion. That hotel was Dan's masterpiece, it was a family to an orphaned man. Dredger Dan had indulged himself, had worked for years to shape it. He had sunk his money into building it into the finest hostelry in the Sierras. Now, like a child separated from its mother at a bier, Dan let the tears flow.

The whiskey, two thousand dollars worth, now had no meaning. Without that polished back bar to stack the labled bottles, it was dross. Without the glittering lamps swinging from the chandelier, to bring life sparkle to the glass mirror and add warmth to the whiskey, to catch heat from the brass mounted round bellied stove, it was a nauseous gelatin in cold bottles.

"That Jezebel!" it was an epithet town from a man in agony and Dan broke down the mountain.

Digger let his partner go, watched the lunging leaps of a man bent on vengeance. Dan was tearing his long coat open, was dragging out his navy colt. Would he really cut down the Seabrights? Digger John felt a queer reluctance to have the woman shot. Not that she hadn't asked for it, smashing all the liquor in Gold Run and now being responsible for the burning of Dan's hotel, that would give Dredger justification to kill. Digger dragged these thoughts through his mind as Dan grew smaller in his crazy descent down the mountain. But *should* he kill a woman? Would dangling on the end of a rope be a fitting end for the pudgy hotelman? To be known forever as the man who'd shot down Dolly Seabright, grand priestess of the Sons of Temperance?

He'd have to be stopped. Digger leaped down the slope in pursuit. A nagging thought kindled as he made his sliding race after Dredger. If Dan was hanged, all that mule train load of whiskey would be free for the taking. Digger halted briefly, while Satan held his hand. Then, with a set face, Digger raced ahead.

Now, far below, a thin figure wearing a green mackinaw had left the snow hung trees. Rifle in hand, it was blocking Dan's path. Digger picked up speed, splashing out gobs of snow like an elephant on a binge. The Sons must have posted pickets!

THEY WERE grappling, Dredger flailing and staggering in the snow. The green mackinaw toothpick was tripping at the fat hotel man like a varmint hunter trying to corral a greasy porcupine.

Digger could now distinguish Dan's captor. It was Slim Deakins, Gold Run's honest gambler. This was a jolt; had Slim joined The Sons? Digger arrived, skidding to a halt that threw snow over both men.

"Slim!"

"Yes, Dig?" Deakins held the wobbling Dan down with a heavy boot.

"You join 'em?"

"No, Dig. I can't be *forced* into anything. The Seabrights came into Gold Run saying, 'Join our temperance group

before the liquor destroys you.' Some joined and the Seabrights changed. Then they said, 'Join our society or *you will be destroyed.*' All who oppose the movement will be dealt with.' And so," Slim said, "the cure has become worse than the disease."

Digger heaved his big body onto Dan's struggling frame. "What happened to the hotel?"

"Dolly's brother burnt it out, Dig. They figured," Slim Deakins pointed down the slope, "that you'd arrive yesterday. They knew you'd blow sky-high, that Dredger Dan'd steam into town with his gun blazing. He would've been a dead duck. I've been up here, waiting since yesterday."

Digger caught the glint in Slim's eyes. "Figure we can outgun them, Slim?"

"Damned right!" Dan broke his face from the snow and shouted. "Dam' right we'll gun 'em! Let me up..."

"Naw," Digger pushed Dan's face back into the mush. "We got some plannin' to do first." He turned back to Slim. "The river miners—they join up with Dolly's Sons, too?"

"Some did, the rest pulled out. They're wintering in Dutch Flat. No help there."

"What's behind Dolly?" Digger's face wrinkled in a frown.

"The angle," answered Slim, "is doubtful. She might be on the level; she charges no dues—just makes collections. Gets them to sign The Pledge. After she takes over, The Sons build these miners boarding houses, call them Dolly's Homes. Charges are high, and the profits are used to support an orphanage in some Mexican town below Monterey. The Pueblo of Los Angels. Dolly's got homes in Bullfrog and Ghost's Channel. They're building another in Bedlow's Crossing."

"Right in the winter?" Digger was patting a snowball together, letting Dredger Dan come up for a long gasping breath.

"Best time; plenty of help lying around," Slim answered moodily. "And the work's all done free. Two hundred men can hew out a mess of lumber to slap up a building between storms."

"What about stoves, furniture an' all?" grunted Digger. "Can't haul such now. Roads are closed."

"They got it, Dig. While the hotel was burning, they saved all the furnishings..."

"The bar?" Hope sprang in Digger's words.

"No. Burned."

"Let Dan up!" Digger John was furious. "Let him go in—an' I'm goin' with him." The big miner slammed the snowball down and was working his Colt, with shaking hands, from under his jacket.

"No." Slim Deakins spoke quickly. "I've a pack ready and I'm going out—first to Bullfrog, then Ghost's Channel. Wherever the Sons are established. I'll dig out something. You and Dan just hole up until I get back."

"Not me!" shouted Dredger, clawing at snow and wriggling free. "I'm not takin' no more Guff from them Sons."

"Now, wait a minute..." Digger gazed back up the mountain and his eyes widened. He brushed at his mouth with the flat of a heavy hand. Those kegs...those bottles...twenty five mule loads...And he was back in Gold Run...The winter ahead could be mighty pleasant, guarding such cargo.

"CONFOUND YOU!" Dredger ran through a string of curses that melted the snow from his face. "You're aimin' to get alone with the whiskey..."

"Sure, Dan," Digger was blunt. "I earn't it. We're goin' to drop down to Gold Run; we're goin' to then unload that whiskey in my adobe. Then we'll guard it. We'll maybe have to fight off them Sons, but we'll wait till Slim comes back. A'drinkin' an' a'fightin'

an' a'drinkin'. This could be the happiest winter of my whole miserable life. I've been scraggin' around this land for years, makin' my opportunities an' bustin' my buttons jest to keep alive. I've never been entirely happy or contented. Dan," Digger turned anxious eyes on the astonished hotel man. "You'd not take Paradise ...can you deny a dyin' man?"

"Dyin' nothin'!" shouted the undecided Dredger Dan.

"Ever' day I live, ever' night I pass, I died another day. Now didn't I, Dan agreed.

Digger John drew a hand over his face and smirked. He rubbed his elbows together until his shirt ripped across the wide shoulder. Then like a slave cut from his shackles, the big man hooted and raced back up the slope. Slim Deakins hauled out his packsack and drifted out. His lean legs calipered him south. Dredger Dan sat in the snow, left alone like a forgotten tent peg. A raging, lonesome man.

They moved the whiskey in that night. The fat hotel man, after laying out Digger like some buccolic corpse, was forced to unload the last five miles, alone. The kegs and cases were stacked in the adobe's large front room and Dan, a shotgun loaded with stove bolts, mounted guard. He gazed out on the moon stained snow and listened to Digger's drunken snoring. The town was a dead thing, except for one lamp that winked from Dolly Seabright's house. And evil eye, sleepless, surveying the ruin she had brought.

And so the weeks passed. Digger relieved Dan during the days. Dredger lost weight, sleeplessly attempting to prevent Digger from reducing the inventory and watching the mountain trail for Slim's return. Digger fattened, became a jovial bear hibernating in paradise.

Outside, Gold Run became a buzz of activity. A hive of mackinawed men set up a saw pit, ripping out timbers; even in the pitiless days of storm. Others had cleared the burned hotel debris, lowered the cellar and faced the walls with native stone. The skeleton of a huge building slowly began to rise. The roof was covered with cedar shakes, the rooms panelled and papered.

The building would be as large as the old hotel and the Seabrights were everywhere. Dolly in her white dress, peaked bonnet and red shawl. Beau Seabright, his polished boots black, his cambric pants brown and a white plain's hat, shouted orders to The Sons. It was a lively, industrious scene, broken only by Beau's nasal shouts that were supported by twin Colts, laced Texas fashion to his long legs.

DREDGER, EYES smarting from his heated glare, kept track of the situation. His trigger finger itched each time one of the Seabrights passed. Digger, saturated, was becoming restless and losing sleep. Three weeks had passed.

"He ain't comin' back, Slim ain't," Digger blurted.

Dan paled, suddenly losing all hope. "He ain't?"

"Somethin's happened to him," added Digger. "D'you realize them Sons ain't come near us? They bushwhacked Slim an' we're penned turkeys," he added moodily. "Once they finish that buildin', they'll come for us. They'll celebrate by dancin' over our corpses. Celebrate..."

Digger mouthed the word and stared over Dan's lowered head. His next words were reflective. "Over in Rough and Ready, they broke outa the Union; set up their own state. 'Cept along came the Fourth of July. Bein' outa the Union, naturally they couldn't celebrate the Fourth. So danged if they didn't rejoin the Union jest so's they *could* celebrate. Once them Sons finish that buildin', they'll be wantin' to celebrate. We got whiskey, an' somehow, we got to get the idea across to them Sons."

"Aw shut up!" moaned Dan.

"I'm joinin'—" Digger belched delicately, "'fore yore likker kills me!"

"Not The Sons!" Dredger was horrified. Then he sneered. "Not afraid of Beau Seabright's guns?"

Digger pushed the curtain back and pointed. "They're comin' for us."

Dan stared out. Beau Seabright and twenty men were slogging down the muddy street. One man carried a rope coiled over his arm.

"You two come out!" Beau had reached the adobe.

Without hesitation, Digger threw open the door, stepped out onto the porch and stood motionless as he heard the door slam behind him.

"I'm out, Seabright."

"What about Dredger?" nasally, the thin lips spat out the question.

"He ain't ready to accept no pledge."

"An' you are?" amazement spread over the faces of the crowd.

"Swilled full," was the bovine answer. "My bones is whiskey logged. My head is swole so big, they's an air pocket back of my eyes. When I walk, my boots fill. Your arguments have turned me against whiskey. I'll take Dolly's pledge; I'll work with you a'buildin' the Miner's Home."

"Give up your gun," Beau muttered. Behind him several miners ran dry tongues over whisker covered lips.

"Nope. You gotta take my word. An' another condition—you got to leave Dan alone."

"But that house is filled with whiskey," objected Beau.

"It *was*," Digger grinned with pleasure. "I reduced the inventory some; they's room now around the stove for a skinny man to sit. An' Dan's trapped the house with powder barrels. He'll blow her up fore he'll let you take him."

"Good riddance!" snapped Beau. "Carl, take five men around back and, you Ben, take. . ."

"Hold on." Digger hauled out his navy Colt and cocked it with a shaky hand. The gun wobbled over the group. With an effort, Digger stilled the muzzle on Seabright's breast.

SEABRIGHT TENSED, crouching, with arms cradled over his guns. A crazy look flashed over the lowered face. His eyes peeked up, and a cat grin began to edge wrinkles up his jaw muscles. Men behind him eased to the side. This was a showdown. Seabright was going to draw on a cocked gun in Digger's shaky hand. A crusader against a whiskey-saturated bum. A bated cheer rose from The Sons.

Digger felt the blast behind him before he heard the roar of Dan's shotgun. The bolts whistled past his diving body. He expected Beau's Colts to blast him as he fell, but Beau had plunged to the snow and the shotgun slugs whined off. Dan's roar of fury slammed over the paralyzed men.

"Next shot's a'comin'!"

The men scattered. Beau Seabright, like a turtle with its shell torn off, crabbed sideways and reached the porch. He hammered a shot through the broken window.

"Stop this!" It was a woman's shrill command.

Digger wiped the snow from his face and looked up. Dolly Seabright, her feet covered by tiny rubber boots, her red shawl dragging through the red muck, was running forward. She was a beautiful creature with rosy cheeks. Her slim bodice raised and the violence of her movements pinned the white skirt against her long legs.

But there was no time to admire her. Beau Seabright had been momentarily startled by her scream, but had recovered and was turning back to the window. They'd smoke Dan out, destroy the whiskey and Digger's plan to stage a celebration would be blasted.

Digger John hustled to his feet and looped long arms around Beau. He felt the ribs give and knew the man's feet were scraping the slippery porch for

purchase. The gun flailed close to Digger's jaw, the front sight racking his face. He mouthed a prayer that the door wasn't bolted, and slammed his weight against the oak. It gave. He twisted the gun from Beau's hand then, with heavy satisfaction, Digger clubbed a fist and knocked Beau to the floor of the adobe.

Dan blasted another shot through the window and rammed fresh shells into the breech. Then he scuttled over and slammed the door. Dan and Digger stared down at the limp Seabright.

"Here's our hostage, Dan," Digger panted.

"Yeah." Dredger spat and raised the shotgun. "Now get out, Digger, else I'll kill you!"

Digger backed away, feeling for the knob. He stepped outside and heard the bolt slam home. He turned and Dolly, small fists clenched, glared up at the big miner. "S'all right. Ma'am. Dredger won't kill him, long's you leave him be."

The distraught woman faced the street and raised her voice. "Disband!" She looped the shawl formally over her shoulders. "You follow me, Digger John!" she snapped and marched forward.

And so, Digger John was given The Pledge. He was bound to an ironclad oath to give up all alcoholic spirits. Seven men wrestled him to the floor of the bath house and, with sand and canvas, attempted to obliterate the odor of whiskey from his huge body. He was assigned, peering forth from hungover bloodshot eyes, to rebuilding the fireplaces in the New Miners' Home.

And he worked hard. A diligent, fuzzy-tongued man who halted only to tell of his three weeks spree to his brother Sons. An Irishman, quick with figures, jotted down an estimate of Digger's consumption. Fourteen cases of quarts, a full mule load had passed down his gullet. That left eighteen mule-loads of spirits in the adobe. The Irishman gulped as Digger lied, "An' it was all pure Irish whiskey."

Men stared at the adobe. What would Dan do with Beau Seabright? Digger noticed that the chimney no longer punched smoke into the cold air. The building was a dead thing, snow-covered, cold, holding the determined Dan and his prisoner. But Dolly's orders kept The Sons from interfering.

DIGGER diverted The Sons by explaining every symptom of his hangover. He enlarged on each painful step of his abstinence until men drooled; then he expanded and detailed former drinking bouts. An orgy at Frisco's Palace Hotel, a full two years before, when champagne flowed to the snap of his fingers.

Other Sons joined in. It was a continued story, kept alive in the cabins as each man broke into his history and lived again the binges and sorties into the civilized fleshpots. Several men deflected off to Dutch Flat, but Dolly's fervor kept The Sons in line. She bolstered their deflating resolutions with honeyed words, broken only occasionally by her depressed thoughts of brother Beau's incarceration in an adobe filled with demon rum.

Then the Miners' Home reached its completion. The raw walls were soaked with stain and men stood back and admired their efforts. It was beautiful, matching in elegance, the hotel Dan had built. And it was fresh, sawmill new, uncontaminated by the tantilizing odor of spirits. An edifice to the Seabrights and The Sons of Temperance.

Dolly mounted a ribbon bedecked porch and faced out to her diciples. She was a radiant spinster, and each man breathed a small hope to join this blonde creature. "Sons of Temperance," the words dripped lavendar. "Your efforts have raised this edifice. It will stand through the years as a monument to the movement..."

"Hold it a minute!" Slim Deakins, ragged and showing the strain of six

weeks travel spoke with a tight voice.

"The Seabrights are crooks!" his words boomed out. "I traveled to Los Angeles, to see the orphanage of The Sons of Temperance. *There was none.* I discovered that the Seabrights have used their movements to enrich themselves, and I have here a banker's affidavit to show that monies collected have been used to build and support the largest gambling hall in San Francisco!" Slim raised a soggy packet of papers and men believed—for this was Slim Deakins, whose words was his bond.

"Yipee!" Dan's voice blared out behind Slim. He supported the wobbly figure of Beau Seabright. Beau was staggering drunk, his lips framing a beatific smile.

Dolly Seabright wilted, her face contorted.

"It's a wig!" hooted Beau. "She's wearin' a blonde wig...and..." he hiccoughed then said belligerently, "An' Dolly's m'wife! M'own little wife. Aint'cha, Dolly, honey?"

"You're drunk!" she shrieked. "All our plans!" Then she sobbed and ran from the porch.

"Danged right I'm drunk," shouted Beau. "That Dam' Dan," he chuckled, "let the stove go out and we hadda stay drunk to keep warm. Betcha," he roared proudly, "I put away more whiskey'n any man alive!" He wobbled after his wife.

Broad grins were spreading among the crowd, as Digger mounted the porch. "Let 'em go, men; somewheres, Satan will catch up with 'em. We got us a celebration comin'. Ain't we jest rebuilt Dredger's Dan's Hotel an'..." he raised his arms... *"An' Saloon?* But first off—fore we re-open the saloon —we gotta restore ownership. Who'll give their work—the last six weeks work—for a full quart of Irish whiskey?"

"I'll donate mine!" shouted the Irishman. "I'll donate mine for a single drink and pay double for every drink after that!"

Eager voices howled agreement. Dan beamed and threw open the double doors. Happy tears filled his eyes as he stepped inside.

Outside the weak daylight was smothered by night. Lamps poked glittering holes from the windows. The Sons formed a que and signed their names on the deed Digger had prepared; then they scuttled about with their full quart of whiskey. Gold Run warmed. The miners gathered at the makeshift bar in the huge dining room. Smoke gathered against the ceiling.

Digger John jealously guarded a full keg. Outside, a buckboard, valises piled under canvas and the reins held in Beau Seabright's shaking hands, carried Dolly and her husband toward the valley.

★

THE OVERLAND DEATH

(*continued from page 21*)

Aggy ignored her father. "You want to ask me to marry you—Norman—isn't that it?" He had just started to nod with his head, when she answered. "Well, I accept your proposal, and the answer is yes."

Norman felt the sweat running down his back between his shoulder blades and the goose-pimples rising under his collar.

Lewt sighed audibly. "Thank heaven *that's* over. Aggy—honey—would you mind feeding your old father—and your damned mealy-mouthed husband-to-be?"

She nodded blissfully and puckered up. Norm's face, as red as fire, went down guiltily and pressed a tender, shy little kiss on her upturned, altogether adorable mouth.

★

It wasn't only that this redheaded stranger might be the mysterious stagecoach bandit and killer — but he'd also made the sheriff and his deputies look like idiots. That was unforgivable!

TRIGGER TREACHERY

NOVELET by ELTON WEBSTER

SPUD SMITH, bald, rubicund, perpetually-perspiring, proprietor of the *Oasis,* was versatile, ambidextrous and facile-minded.

Attesting which, witness that, late one afternoon, Spud was polishing a glass on his apron, whistling "La Paloma" tunefully, reading the big *Denver Weekly* spread on the bar before him, and keeping a mental score of the four-handed pool game in progress on the combination table at the far end of the long, low ceiled garish room.

Having disciplined his eyes, ears, hands, and whistling apparatus to work independently, Spud was hitting efficiently on all cylinders with no lost motion anywhere; but had to give it up and concentrate when the creaking shutter door swung open, and Sheriff Lew Gideon shoved his saddle-stained person inside.

Stopping "La Paloma" right in the midst of an ascending trill that was his pride, brushing the paper aside, adding the glass to a glittering pyramid on the back bar, and letting the score of the pool game take care of itself for the time being, Spud polished his way to the rear end of the bar, then stood, rag in hand, one attentive ear cocked to catch the sheriff's order. As he did so, the shutter creaked again; and three of Gideon's deputies filed back to set jingling heels on the polished brass rail, and nod their heads in silent endorsement when their chief spun a dollar on the bar and ordered straight rye.

Setting out the red-amber bar bottle, Spud slid a glass to the elbow of each of his patrons without moving out of his tracks, then commenced cracking ice for the chasers.

Knowing fagged and thirsty men when he saw them, Spud put on full steam, deftly spinning a glass of ice-water to the elbow of each, as the bottle was passed along the line.

Slapping ashy-looking dust off his corduroyed arms with his wide-cuffed buck gauntlets, the big, sandy-headed, open-faced sheriff noted the bustling proprietor's efficiency with open admiration. "Some w o r k e r yourself,

Spud," he applauded, then added, with a twinkle of amusement in his mild gray eyes, "Don't know but I'll have to fire this bunch, an' take you on."

Two of the sheriff's helpers, the Preston twins, were lank, freckled and fiery-headed plains punchers, serving only during the emergency which confronted the peace officer. These grinned sheepishly at his sly dig, and let it go at that.

The third, a regular deputy, was dark, middle aged, sober faced, heavy of body and slow of thought and motion. Failing to respond to his chief's badinage, the deputy eyed his drink glumly. "Needn't kid us," he growled. "Can't see that you've rounded up any great big herd o' holdup artists yourself, in these last few weeks."

Gideon threw his big head back and his even teeth flashed white as he laughed uproariously. "Stung!" he admitted. "Stung, an' fair enough, at that. Needn't look so ringy about it though, Hollis. I know you boys is all right. Just hurrahin' you a mite. C'mon, let's study our astronomy—looking at the sky through a glass. Here's hopin' we ketch that ranny!"

"Which we will," Hollis contributed, with stolid purposefulness, gripping his glass with thumb and all four fingers.

AS THE FOUR crooked their elbows in unison, Spud scratched his shining dome thoughtfully, and ventured a direct question. "Rustlers workin'?"

"Worse'n that," Gideon answered gloomily. "Denver stage outa Hillview was held up in Grizzly Gulch on the down trip this mornin'. One lone waddy done it. Got a big haul at that—an even ten thousand, all in big bills."

"Le's see," Spud considered. "Ol' Dick Wade is drivin' on that line, ain't he?"

"*Was* drivin'," Gideon corrected him suggestively. "Dick got foolish and went fur the sawed-off shotgun he had cached back of the cushion."

Spud pursed his thin lips and whistled in astonishment. "Now look at that!" he grunted disgustedly. "Dick got gray as a rat drivin' that line, then had t' go an' make a bum play like that.

"Them fellers back there is all right," he added, dropping his voice as the sheriff turned his back to the bar, hooked a heel over the footrail and gave the four at the pool table a deliberate once over.

"That's the big trouble aroun' this country," Hollis cut in, setting down his glass and wiping the back of his hand across his mouth. "Ev'rybody 'roun' here's awright; still rustlin' an' stage holdups goes right on. Some o' these awright fellers is aw-wrong, if we only kin figger out which one it is."

"Well, it ain't none of them boys back there," Spud insisted. "Anyway, if that holdup was way over in the gulch, how come you fellers is prowlin' 'roun' in Mesa? What makes you think that ranny's at this crossroads?"

"Well, he ain't nowheres else." Gideon answered, grinning whimsically.

"Fact is, Spud," he continued, "this bein' the seventh straight holdup an' clean getaway in this county in six weeks, each a one-man fiesta, I was pretty close behin' that ranny this time. Got the Denver line covered both ways, foothill trails, too. Only way fur him t' git out is through Mesa an' east over the prairie—an' me'n the boys is here, ready, t' pick up ary strange maverick that strays—"

"As I was sayin'," Spud cut in, giving his shining dome an almost perceptible jerk toward the front and winking warningly, "as I was sayin', you kin have your suppers sent in from the Dutchman's next door if you like. They's a table back there you kin use."

SPUD TURNED to the cash register to ring up the sheriff's coin. As he waddled back with the change, he appeared to note for the first time that

he had a new patron at the upper end of the bar.

Just inside the shutter, and with his back against it, a lean, withy looking young fellow stood, deliberately appraising the room and its occupants.

Open blue eyes, serious enough at the moment, but somehow conveying an impression of humor ready to rise, collaborated with the sunburst of curly red hair to suggest the effeminate, an implication which the firm chin and resolute mouth valiantly denied.

In apparel the stranger presented another paradox.

The black silk shirt with flaring scarlet neckcloth caught with a silver loop, the picturated elkhide vest and heavily-studded hatband, holsters and leather cuffs, bespoke the prairie dandy. Disputing them flatly, the corduroy trousers, high-heeled boots and plain, wooden-butted sixes looked capable enough.

Lolling with his back against the bar and elbows resting on it, one heel hooked over the rail, thumbs tucked beneath his belt, the sheriff eyed the newcomer aslant in a silence that grew oppressive.

Spud pottered about the back bar. The twins politely curbed their surging curiosity and made pretense of cigarette making. Hollis fixed his somber, muddy eyes on the stranger and scowled thoughtfully.

One of the four at the pool table cuffed the balls about absently, the other three staring steadily toward the front.

Every cubic inch of air in the stale, dingy place was charged with dynamics, a situation to which the man at the shutter was not oblivious. Commencing with the sheriff, he made a quick inventory of every occupant of the room.

A little smile crinkled the corners of his mouth as he shot a keen appraising glance at Gideon. The twins were swept from head to foot with a look that was a mere flash, but appeared to fix their status definitely. Dour-browed Hollis came in for more attention, and Spud was similarly flattered.

The four at the pool table earned but one collective inspection, which, short as it was, gave the hovering bartender time to lean across the bar and whisper his verdict into the sheriff's ear. "B-a-double-d, ba-a-ad," Spud assayed him.

By "bad" Spud didn't mean that the stranger was wicked or depraved, but only that he was a fighter from crown to sole.

Gideon nodded his big head in short affirmative, then shifted his position and gave his right holster a cuff to the front.

Slight as the motion was, it caught the newcomer's eye, as did the supporting move of Hollis, who eased away from the bar and tramped heavily to the wall opposite—a sagacious flank movement strictly in keeping with the subtle deputy's character.

The newcomer's reaction was as unique as it was instantaneous. Smiling whimsically, he deserted the shutter, and with the typical cowboy roll in his gait, he walked straight down the bar, then around the end, and back along it to where Spud was standing. Turning his back to the astounded proprietor, the newcomer raised his gauntleted hands high and grinned over his shoulder as he drawled, "Well, peel me, Mister."

"Peel you?" Spud sputtered. "Why what the— Say, I ain't no valley! If you wanta shed 'em, just shuck 'em off, yourself!"

" 'Fraid to," the newcomer admitted, his grin broadening as he jerked his blond head toward those in front of the bar. "Them gazabos out there is so plumb nervous-lookin' that I dassent poke a hand towards my belt fur fear they'll fall over in a fit an' mess this place all up. What's the matter 'ith me, anyway?" he inquired, dropping his head to look his trim figure over

solicitously. "Pants tored, or somethin'?"

"Look like you're assembled plumb proper," Spud remarked, judgmatically, then added with proper asperity at thought that the sacred precincts of the back bar were being flagrantly invaded. "You may stay assembled, too—if you quit this monkey-foolin' and g't t' hell outa here! Otherwise, I ain't guaranteein' nothin'."

The redheaded puncher shook his head in seeming uneasiness and looked at Gideon, who had revolved slowly to keep his eye on the newcomer as the latter left the door for the back bar.

"You big feller, with the tinware on your suspenders," the stranger drawled. "Reckon you could stand the tremendous strain if I dropped my hands t' unhook this belt?"

Gideon flushed hotly, then his easy good nature asserted itself. "Come 'roun' in front, Mister," he invited. "We was about t' take our first dose o' medicine. Git your belly t' the mahogany an' tell the man what."

Watching slant-eyed, Spud saw the puncher make quick inventory of the four recently drained glasses, and smiled comprehendingly as he lowered his long arms and unhooked his belt.

"Safety first," he explained, as he started around the bar, handing the belt and guns to Spud as he passed. "You fellers may be amicable-minded, but you don't looks it. If you plug me you will do it knowin' that I'm plumb afoot."

"K-double-e-n ke-e-en," Spud muttered to himself as he hustled glasses for the five. "He saw even how much ice was melted in them chaser glasses, an' knowed Gideon lied when he said they hadn't drunk none fur a long spell. K-double-e-n, keen, an' plumb bad!" Next thing is—what fur?"

The newcomer lifted his glass last, drained it slowly after the others had set down their empties.

Then he leaned a withy shoulder on the bar and started a sinewy hand toward his hip pocket moving it in a wide, slow circle as he drawled, "Don't nobody git nervous when I make this gesture. Just goin' fur the makin's."

Gideon and the twins grinned sheepishly, but, sulking at the stranger's other elbow, gloomy browed Hollis growled, "Nobody's a cussed bit afraid of you, Mister, an—"

"So-o-o?" the puncher cut in, raising his brows in guileless surprise. "Waal, in that case, what fur did you shuffle over there t' the wall an' squeeze the rivets outa them smoke-sticks a bit ago? Do that ev'ry time a gent drops in here fur a little lifesaver, eh?"

-2-

THE FLUSH on the deputy's dark heavy face deepened, but open-dealing Gideon took the conversation away from him. "We was stallin' you all right," he admitted frankly. "Fact is, they was a hold-up over in the hills this mornin', an' somewheres twixt there an' here is the gent that done it. It's got t' come out this way. No chance a-tall t' git a hawse out anywheres else. Got the hill trails all plugged. By the way, Mister, which way you ridin'?"

The puncher continued blowing a recalcitrant oblong of rice paper loose from his packet, then commenced sifting granulated tobacco into it, as he answered, "East."

A heavy silence greeted the admission.

The twins shuffled their feet in embarrassment. Spud coughed high in his throat as a nervous man does when the tension tightens. Hollis scowled blacker than ever, and even Gideon looked grave as he shot a more direct question. "An' whereabouts from?"

"Cheyenne, by way of Denver," the

stranger answered, then stuck the finished cigaret on his lip and hoisted a muscular leg to scratch a match.

There was another heavy silence while the young puncher cupped both hands over the blazing bit of wood, the habit of one accustomed to the open, squinting one eye to fend off the heat as he turned the other on Hollis.

"Well, somebody say it," he drawled, finally straightening and flipping the match over his shoulder with a snap of his thumb.

"Awright," Gideon said, motioning Hollis to be quiet. "I'll ask right in meetin'. Just where'd you bunk last night?"

"Empty cabin on Topknot Hill," the puncher answered readily. "Furthermore I'm headed fur North Platte, where I ride fur the Cody outfit—when I ain't somewhere else. Name's Walt Peters, commonly knowed as Red. My ma's a Methodist, an' dad votes the Republican ticket, most usual, an' I snore some when I'm tired. Further information on demand."

"She's demanded," Gideon announced promptly. "What I wanta know is, who'd you see goin' t' Topknot or comin' away from there? In other words, layin' my cards right down, I'm doubtin' that you rid all the way from there t'day 'thout us ketchin' sight of you some—bein' as we put in the day twixt there an' here."

Red considered the question for some time, then went to the rear of the room and sat down with his back in a corner. Tilting his spurred heels to the table-top, he hailed those up front. "Come an' ride herd on me," he invited them. "I ain't gonna answer no more questions, none whatever."

"Ride herd is right," Gideon growled peevishly. "Go watch 'im, Hollis. Don't take no chances; if he makes a crooked play, shoot 'im in two. Now keep your eye peeled an—"

"But wouldn't it be better t' find out whether he told the truth or not, 'fore you close-pen 'im that-a-way?" asked a mild voice from the upper end of the room.

Unnoticed the shutter had swung again; and just inside stood a little iron-gray man with long, drooping mustaches and bushy black brows, frosted at the tips.

A vest and trousers of butternut jeans, with battered felt hat that matched their color, flaming new sleeve-garters and hobnailed boots bespoke the miner or prospector.

THE PLAIN wooden butts of a pair of old style sixes protruded from the worn holsters which swung on a broad heavy belt, carrying a double row of cartridges.

Over one arm was thrown a long-skirted frock coat which matched the pants and vest.

The rock-hard face matched with the rest of him—rugged, furrowed, leathery, with a slightly beaked nose and sharply protruding chin. The eyes were shoe-black, piercing, never at rest.

"As I was sayin'," the latest comer remarked, as he strode up to the bar with the firm, brisk step that one would expect of him, "if that puncher says he bunked over on Topknot, an' you say he didn't bunk over on Topknot, why don't you just up an' find out who's right? They's a telephone up at the Silverton mine, on the hill next t' Topknot. Why don't you just call 'em up an' git the straight of it?"

"Aw, let 'em dream, stranger," Red's drawl floated from the rear of the room. "Never mind me. Better look out fur yourself. Them man-ropers'll be havin' you hawgtied in a minute or so."

"Like hell they will," the little iron-gray man announced indifferently. "Well, what you gonna say?" he inquired, turning to Gideon.

"Reckon you're right," the fair-minded sheriff admitted. "Course I can't see how he got down here 'thout runnin' over us, if he did come from

Topknot way. Howsomever, we kin phone an' see if anyone built a fire out there last night. If they did, it musta been him. Central's over at the stage office; I'll just lope over there an' call 'em up."

"Drinkin' first?" the newcomer inquired, shifting his coat to the other arm and appropriating the bar bottle, then looking expectantly at Spud, who trotted to bring glasses.

Having imbibed a lonesome draft, the others not being a-thirst, the stranger jerked the end off a cheroot with his even front teeth, lighted a match on the end of his notched thumbnail, and puffed furiously as he leaned his straight back against the wall and watched the revival of the pool game.

Fifteen minutes brought Gideon, mystified, but apologetic.

While the twins looked their disappointment and Hollis growled protests beneath his breath, the sheriff admitted that he had been hasty and apologized fulsomely.

Yes, he'd got Ed Holcomb, the mine manager on the wire, and it was a lucky thing at that. Ed had seen a fire on Topknot on the previous evening. It was an unusual place to camp, so Ed had looked over there again in the morning, and saw the geezer's breakfast fire, just before sunup.

"That settles it, pardner," the sheriff wound up his tale. "No chanct fur a feller t' git a hawse down from there in time t' shag over inta the gulch an' hold ol' Dick up. You're plumb loose on this range, so git your belt an' buckle 'er on. Furthermore, everybody step up an' have one 'ith me, an' no hard feelin's."

"Shake," invited the iron-gray man, shifting the coat again to extend a lean hand and pump the sheriff's arm energetically. "Name's Benson—John Benson. Live down Fort Sidney way. Maybe you've heard of me?"

Gideon shook his head dubiously. "Maybe have. I'm a poor hand at rememberin' names. Well, le's liquor up; we got t' be ridin'. Comin' almost sundown, an' somewheres twixt here an' them hills is a waddy that's grabbed off ten thousand, and nicked ol' Dick Wade.

"He's just nachully bound t' be in there, 'cause he ain't passed here. If he won't come out, we got t' shag in there an' roust 'im. Beats hell, though, that— Gor awmighty, what's comin' next?"

The shutter again.

Not inside this time, but just without, and holding the door open with one hand, stood a slender, dark-haired girl in a blue-flannel shirt, chic corduroy skirt, flat-brimmed gray hat and trim riding boots, who beckoned with her free hand and called, "Oh, Daddy!"

AS BENSON'S erect figure left the bar to stride briskly across the sawdust-littered floor to the front in answer to her summons, Hollis eased to the sheriff's elbow and whispered, "How 'bout him? Where you reckon *he* dropped from?"

Gideon started at the abrupt question, then eyed Benson's trim back aslant as the latter stood in the doorway, engaged in low-voiced conversation with his daughter.

Beyond them a saddled pinto and a fat, black packhorse laden with camp dunnage, stood at the edge of the walk. Both were droopy-eared and dust-caked from hard travel.

"Hu-u-m!" Gideon grunted, scratching his big head dubiously at sight of the tired horses. "Maybe you're right, Hollis, but—"

"Awright, hon. Be with you in a minute," Benson said in a louder tone as he swung the shutter to and turned back to the bar. Outside they heard the jingle of the girl's spurs and the light tap of her heels across the walk as she stepped to the edge of the wide wooden awning where the horses stood.

"Got t' ride," Benson announced laconically, then jerked the cheroot from his mouth with one hand and

raised his neglected drink with the other.

As he set down the glass and brushed the drooping mustaches two ways to make room for the cheroot, Hollis nudged Gideon, and the big sheriff asked, a little diffidently, "Ridin' which way, Mister?"

Again that heavy silence, a silence that seemed to shriek aloud. In the act of relighting the expired cheroot, Benson snapped his head slightly toward his questioner and bored him with his restless sloe eyes as he continued to puff at the obstinate weed.

Having regained his belt, Blondy strolled to the rear of the men knotted at the bar.

After starting the cheroot to glowing, Benson shifted his eyes from the sheriff to Hollis, then snarled unexpectedly, "None of your damn' business!"

With the words the *Oasis* snapped from tense expectancy to roiled activity.

Spud dropped his rag with ludicrous suddenness, slapped both hands palms down on the bar, and stood like a mute motionless emblem of neutrality; only his worried eyes moved, in futile attempt to keep up with the kaleidoscopic shifting of positions by every man in the room.

Back by the pool table, four cues struck the floor almost in unison as the players dropped them to claw at their hips, only to pause in the act and face about obediently as, behind them, Red's voice sounded cold and hard and crackling like ice breaking in a swollen river. "Hands off them guns! Steady, now! Face around t' the wall, an' pet it some with your fingers!"

Simultaneously, Gideon and the Preston twins swung around in time to see Hollis lumbering to his former position at the wall, revolving slowly there, just in time to feel his ribs prodded by a gun in the gnarled hand of Benson, who had taken three cat-like backward steps.

Jerking the deputy around on his heel, the iron-gray man grew a second gun miraculously in his free hand and poked its frowning black muzzle over Hollis' shoulder straight at the sheriff's broad chest.

"Easy as is!" Benson snapped, his sloe eyes appearing to cover every part of the room. "Don't nobody git the arm-wiggles till I say when!"

MEANWHILE, the shutter had slammed open so hard that it banged against the battered cigar case, and the girl appeared on the threshold again, this time holding at a business-like level a sawed-off shotgun, strategically located to rake the bar from end to end.

Every inch a finer model of her rugged sire, the girl squinted a calculating brown eye along the dull, blue-steel barrel, fairly radiating firm determination and alert readiness. "Now then, you sheriff feller!"

Benson's fuming cheroot gyrated rapidly in a corner of his mouth as he spoke.

Bewildered Gideon, slow-thoughted and slow-moving under any circumstances, jerked out of a daze and ran his tongue along the edge of a dry lip, then gulped, "Well?"

"Turn aroun' an' lay your hands on the bar! You other jaspers, too! That's right an' plumb sensible. Steady, now! Hey, Barkeep!"

"Who, me?" Spud sputtered. "Say, pardner, I'm declarin' absolute neutrality, now an' hereafter. I ain't lost no stage-robbers nor no cattle rustlers nor no sheriffs. All I want is—"

"Uh-huh, I understand," Benson cut in, spitting out the frazzled stogie without moving his head. "However, circumstances sometimes rises in which a feller hasta do as he's told, whether he likes it or not. This is one of them times. Now you ramble out here in front an' peel the belts off them jaspers."

In the doorway the girl shifted the shotgun to keep pace with the sweat-

ing bartender's fumbling movements, always having it frowning at the man whose belt he was unbuckling as he disarmed the three at the bar.

As Spud removed the belt from the second Preston twin and tossed it behind the bar, Hollis suddenly heaved back with all the strength of his sturdy legs, jamming Benson tightly against the wall behind them. With a motion he dragged out a gun and started to jam it underneath his own shoulder.

As the gun flashed around in a short arc, destined for the straining body of Benson, a shot crashed out from the rear of the room, followed by a curse from Hollis and the chug of his gun on the floor, then by Red's even drawl, "Don't nobody go an' get excited none. One gazabo went an' played outa his turn, an' I had t' amputate his gun. Next jasper makes a bobble may not be so lucky. Hey, Boss! Ramble on back here an' shuck these waddies, so they won't feel plumb neglected!"

PERSPIRING copiously and stepping gingerly, Spud disarmed the pool players, then cuffed sweat off his dripping forehead and planted himself by the refrigerator, where he stood shuffling uneasily while Red and Benson ranged the room's occupants against the back wall.

"Program?" Red inquired of Benson, smiling as he looked past that fiery-eyed old warrior to where the girl still stood keeping the unwavering shotgun at a level.

"Get away!" Benson barked back laconically.

"Awright, you an' her start ridin'. I'll foller when you got a good lead. She better leave me that shotgun, though. Looks kinda miscellaneous actin', if you git what I mean."

"Goin'," Benson acquiesced, starting out promptly.

At the door he turned to bore the sheriff through with the sloe eyes, then shifted them to where Hollis stood glowering and gripping his numbed wrist.

"Good evenin', gentlemen," Benson addressed them suavely, then clumped over the walk and across the dun, hoof-cupped street to untie his roach-maned roan gelding from the hitchrack on the opposite side of the street.

Swinging into saddle, he loped back to look inquiringly at his daughter, who still stood dominating the situation with the sawed-off gun.

"Ready!" Benson announced crisply, after giving the pack-horses' tie-rope a half hitch around his saddle horn.

"Just a minute!" Red called from inside, then tramped back to lock the rear door and throw the key into the street ahead of him as he reappeared in the doorway, then crossed to get his rangy silver-trimmed dun gelding from the rack.

"Preparedness," he remarked, as he dropped the rein at the edge of the walk, then reached for the shotgun.

"Ready!" Benson announced again, as his daughter released her hold on the piece.

"Ride!" she answered laconically, then seated herself on the edge of the walk, crossed a booted calf over her knee and gazed abstractedly to where a dying sun was tinting the western hills with orange and purple and lavender.

"C'mon!" Benson ordered authoritatively, thrusting out his firm chin.

"No," she answered, tilting up a finer replica of that chin rebelliously.

"You'll need a start. My bronc is fresher than yours, and old Nig will break no speed records carrying that pack. Ride!"

"Le's go," Red called, a little uneasily, without looking around. "I can close-herd this bunch from now till fall round-up time, but they's no tellin' when some other geezer'll come ramblin' in an' maybe act discommodin'."

"Co'mon, Bess," Benson pleaded, changing tactics in the face of mutiny.

"Ride, Daddy," the girl replied with finality.

Benson looked her over dubiously, shook his shaggy head, then flecked the packhorse lightly with his quirt and jogged off up Main Street to northward, without looking back.

After her father had gone a hundred yards, the girl rose and walked to where Red stood watching over the shutter.

"Your horse fast?" she inquired.

"Plenty."

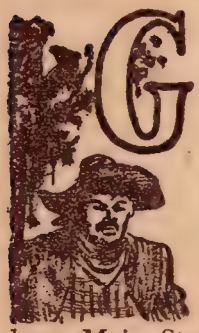
"Good! We'll give Daddy ten or fifteen minutes, then I'll cut all their broncs loose and go. All we want is to get into the hard land over northeast by nightfall. They'll never catch up with us."

"Uh-huh," Red acquiesced. "Well, Miss, just shuffle along when you're ready an' never mind me. That hawse o' mine kin—hey, you geezer in the red shirt, keep huggin' that wall—kin make 'em hustle t' see my dust 'fore it gits settled."

The ticking of the grimy faced wall clock above the long, specked mirror back of the bar dominated the sordid room as the minutes passed.

Now and then a bootheel scraped and a spur jingled as someone inside shifted position gingerly.

- 3 -



GOING northward at a brisk jog, Benson and the packhorse rolled up a cloud of dun dust which changed to a murky gray as the dusk came on fast and distance shaded them.

Back in the town, down Main Street to southward and across it, Old Martin, keeper of the stage barn, came to the edge of the walk in front of his place, and looked curiously at the girl before the saloon.

After observing her for a time, Red being hidden from view in the doorway, he started toward the *Oasis,* but stopped when two punchers turned the corner of the barn and hailed him.

As the three came together and looked and pointed in her direction, the girl leaned carelessly against an awning post and made Red aware of the situation. "How's your father makin' it?" he inquired.

"Fine! He's just turning east at the fork of the trail—a mile to the good, or more."

"Awright! Climb that pinto an' we'll make a run for it! Too bad they didn't give us more time—"

"They're going inside!" she called guardedly.

"Bully!" he applauded. "Soon's they git outa sight, cut all them broncs loose from the rack, an' we'll leave."

Watching alertly over the shutter, Red heard the girl leave the walk after a little time. Seconds later, a bronc trotted off down the street, then another and another.

Then someone hailed them by the barn, and the girl spoke from the edge of the walk. "All ready! Hurry! They're coming!"

Backing quickly to the street, still keeping the gun bearing over the shutter, Red caught the rein she handed him and swung easily up.

"Now shake that bronc some, Miss," he ordered.

As the pinto's gouging hoofs spooned up brown sand from the rutted street, Red whirled the dun around with his knees and brought the shotgun to bear on the three racing toward him from the barn, smiling as he noted that they had not waited to get out their mounts.

Immediately all three ducked into the nearest sheltering doorway, and from it a sixgun barked spitefully, and a bullet hummed past the peaked crown of Red's wide-brimmed white hat.

Bellowing a prompt answer, the shotgun raked the front of their shelter, the heavy charge of buckshot riving

out the wood splinters and sending fragments of broken glass tinkling to the floor inside. A moment later the dun was racing in the wake of the galloping pinto, while the sagged walk in front of the *Oasis* swayed beneath the pounding feet of the released prisoners.

For a time indignant Mesa boiled turbulently, milled purposelessly, then spewed out hot pursuit.

Having rushed to the open unarmed, those at the saloon chugged back inside to retrieve their guns from back of the bar, ramming against each other in their haste, volleying a medley of wild threats and wilder suggestions.

Slow of thought and motion, Gideon got the wrong belt and had to exchange with a lank puncher. Straightened out at last, he led his gang outside, where he found one of the three newcomers emerging from the barn with a string of mounts, while the other two were catching loose horses in the street.

Hat off, sandy hair abristle with excitement, his heavy face ablaze with hot anger, Gideon mounted, leaned over the pommel and spurred desperately in the direction of two scurrying dust clouds just changing their course from north to east in the hazy distance.

"Ride, buckaroos!" he bellowed as all about him men leaped into saddle. "A hundred out of my pocket for any one of them three, dead or alive!"

"Mine'll be delivered dead!" bawled Hollis as he spurred up alongside, then passed his chief and went raging on.

THAT TRADITION of the sailors, "a stern chase is a long chase," holds as true on land as on water.

Moving six feet to the racing pinto's five, Red's rangy dun inched his bobbing muzzle to the girl's stirrup after she had covered a mile; they had reached the fork of the trail.

Pounding eastword for another mile, they overhauled Benson, who had slackened the packhorse's tie-rope and was hazing the burdened animal along ahead of him.

Like Red and the girl, the sheriff's party had closed up on the leader to some extent.

Another mile ahead over the sandy plain broken buttes loomed like brown monuments in the gathering dusk—the hard-rock country which joined hills to plain and which offered hundreds of crisscrossed trails the labyrinths of which spelled safety.

Leaning his weight on one stirrup to snap a menacing quirt over the tired packhorse's sweat-streaked rump, Benson greeted them as they drew alongside on the hoof-packed trail. "Put it over, eh? Hurt any of 'em?"

"Nothin' but their tender feelin's," Red drawled, grinning widely. "That sheriff feller's so hoppin' mad he's bitin' his own neck. An' Hollis—well, if we live till mornin', he'll die in despair. That black hawse's kinda wored out, ain't he?"

"Plenty much. Doubt if he kin make it t' them buttes in time fur us t' pick us a canyon 'fore they see us go into it."

"Oh, maybe he will," Red answered, optimistically, then reined the dun to allow the girl to take her place beside her father. As she drew past, he handed her the shotgun, then drew a scarred-butted rifle from its scabbard at his saddleskirts.

Alert, Benson sensed the movement and twisted about in saddle to nod grim approval. "Hold 'em one minute at the edge of them buttes, an' we'll make it. Wust come t' wust, we kin turn that packer loose, an'—"

"Wust ain't come yit," Red cut in, raising his voice as he dropped slowly back toward the yammering pack behind. "You might just keep punchin' that black web-foot some industrious an' pay no mind if you hear a ruckus!"

"Much obliged, stranger, if I never see you again," Benson called, then spurred to the black's straining flanks and hazed him off the trail and into

the narrow, dark opening between two friendly boulders just as the rattle of pistol fire sounded in the ruck behind.

WHIRLING the dun crosswise of the trail, Red raised the scarred-butted rifle and fired into the brown of them.

First huddling as all undisciplined men do instinctively when attacked, then fanning out as reason asserted itself, the sheriff's force formed into a wavering semi-circle. They advanced toward the buttes, keeping up a rolling pistol fire which sent a hail of hissing pellets singing into the little canyon, ricocheting off rocks, chugging into the sandy floor, doing everything except what the marksmen intended. The reason being that sagacious Red, afoot now, and with the darkness of the canyon in his favor, kept shifting his position, astutely and unexpectedly.

Breaking out of the pack, one horseman bore recklessly down the white trail, standing up in stirrups to fire steadily as he charged.

"That'll be Hollis," Red decided, then raised the rifle and squinted calculatingly.

With the bellow of the piece, the horse reared high, came down with all four feet nested, then toppled over on his side, threshed his legs spasmodically, and lay still.

Working his feet free, the rider took refuge behind the fallen animal and renewed his fire.

"Don't suit me," Red grunted, noting scurrying men afoot about to outflank him on either side. "Reckon them folks has had that precious minute an' a little more, so maybe I'd best go somewheres."

"I think you're right," came a quiet voice from behind him, and the young puncher whirled in surprise to see the girl leading the little pinto from behind a neighboring boulder.

"Thought—thought you'd gone!" he sputtered as she eased into her saddle.

"Not gone, but going," she answered evenly. "They'll never catch Daddy now, so we'd best travel while we can."

"Reckon you said something that time, Miss." Red answered, highheeling it through the sand toward the eager dun. "I like company, but them sociable-minded jaspers suits me too well. If you know where we're goin', shake that bronc an' le's fan it outa here!"

Winding her way surely through veined passageways which offered their pursuers a hundred guesses as to which course they had taken, the girl gave the little pinto his head. Red held the dun at her saddleskirts, grinning in the darkness as he heard futile yelling and shooting growing dimmer and dimmer as their mounts raced steadily through the sand.

After fifteen minutes the pinto's hoofs, then the dun's, rang on rock. Then they breasted a sharp ridge and the girl turned to the left along it, at the same time checking her jaded mount to a walk.

"Ain't turned around, are you?" Red inquired casually.

"No. We're doubling back on them. Daddy must be only a little way on ahead now. Hard trails lead every way from this hogback. That's the beauty of it. I know which way he'll go, but those fellows back there never will guess."

AFTER ANOTHER quarter of a mile covered at a walk, she reined in where the ridge sloped down to another section of nested boulders traversed by rock-floored passages which forbade trailing. "Thanks, stranger." she said, leaning over to extend a gauntleted hand. "You can go any which way from here without leaving sign."

Inching the dun to sociable proximity to the pinto, Red hooked a leg over the horn and swung his foot idly, ignoring her proffered hand. "Nice evenin', ain't it?" he remarked casually.

"It is," she answered, with a little ripple of laughter; then a moment

later, "Well, if you won't shake hands, goodby and good luck. I'm waiting for you to start."

"Ladies first," Red answered, sweeping off his hat to bow low over the saddlehorn. "After you've choosed your path, I'll choose mine. Fair enough, eh?"

"It certainly is," she admitted.

"Awright, she's a bargain, an' no backin' out. Shake hearty!"

The girl extended her hand again and after a time worked it free from his clasp.

"We may see you again, some time," she said as she turned her mount sharply down a little declivity at the foot of which a tumbling brook from the foothills to westward brawled toward the plain.

"Reckon so," he answered from the crest of the ridge.

Conning her pony into the rushing stream, then along its pebbly floor for a quarter of a mile, the girl left it for the rocky bed of a dry wash, and started to breast the steep side of another and higher ridge to westward.

The moment her mount's scrambling hoofs left the gravel for the harder surface of the wash, the girl checked him abruptly and turned in surprise.

Back of the pinto the dun and his rider showed a darker splotch on the murky trail.

"This is not fair," she rebuked him as he drew alongside, again. "I was to select my way, you yours."

"Correct, Sis. Go t' the head of the class," he answered, impudently. "I waited for you to choose your trail so's I could choose the same one. Not wishin' t' keep anything back from you, I'm remarkin' now that I'm gonna do that fur the rest of my life. Fine evenin', ain't it?"

There was a short silence, then the pert little pinto fished for the bit and plodded ahead unchecked.

Reaching the crest of the ridge, the girl reined in again and pointed to a narrow defile that separated it from another of its kind, still to westward.

"The trail up that valley leads straight to trouble," she said slowly and impressively, "trouble with which you have no concern and in which you ought not to allow yourself to become involved."

"Fine evenin', ain't it?" he remarked again, crowding the dun past her and taking the lead.

Throwing up her hand in a little gesture of helplessness, the girl followed without a word.

Fifteen minutes later, Benson hailed on ahead, and in another hour the three of them unsaddled in the heart of a cluster of huge rocks, where they made camp in complete safety, and with an abundance of wood and water at hand.

Much to Red's surprise, Benson made no comment on his presence, probably because he shrewdly suspected from the outset that Red would be hard to shake off.

UNDER AN overhanging rock a fire was built. By the time the menfolk had tethered the tired horses, erected a pup tent for the girl and spread down their tarps and blankets, she had fried bacon, made coffee, warmed canned vegetables, which, with crackers in lieu of bread, provided a meal which the three devoured with proper gusto and no uneasiness, they being confident that the sheriff's gang would be unable to unravel the trail they had laid.

Having supped, Benson bullied his daughter off to bed, he and Red washing the dishes and tidying up the camp for the night.

That done, Benson produced a cheroot, Red started his pipe into a comfortable glow, and for the first time reference was made to Red's unceremonious attachment to the Benson outfit.

Seated crosslegged by the fire, Benson lighted the cheroot with a twig which carried a ruddy coal at one end, squinting past it at the puncher as he remarked, "You're plumb welcome here

t'night, Mister—er—Peters, I believe I heard you call it."

"Yes, Walt Peters—make it Red fur short."

"All right, Red. I wasn't what you might call plumb overcome with surprise when you stuck on with us tonight. Reckon you didn't know where else t' go, fur the time bein', maybe not knowin' yur way through them buttes in the dark. Come daylight, I'll steer you outa here an' send you on your way."

Lying on his back with his hands crossed behind his head and pipe glowing comfortably, Red saw the tent flaps part ever so slightly and a pert nose show in the flickering fireglow as he drawled, "Bound t' git rid of me, eh?"

"Yes, if you wanta put it that way. I don't want t' git you tangled with the law."

"Well, it'll be plumb easy fur you t' git shut of me. All you'll halfta do is t' shoot me."

Red grinned again as he saw the nose disappear behind the closing walls, while across the fire Benson bored him with the restless eyes, started to make hot retort, then smiled in surrender as he remarked, "Well, anyway, you're here tonight, just 'cause you're here, so we'll pass that fur right now."

After Benson had consumed his second cheroot by burning it at one end and chewing it to a frazzle at the other, he rose, yawned and stretched sleepily, then went to his tarp.

"Gittin' late fur a old buck t' be up. Reckon we'd as well turn in," he suggested, then peeled coat and vest and sat down to remove his boots.

"Didn't sleep well last night," he added, wrestling with his second boot. "Too durned dusty an' windy where we camped up there on Topknot."

THE LITTLE campfire under the over-hanging ledge in the close-walled valley still held ruddy coals beneath their gray-ash covering when Benson raked it open hours before sunrise next morning.

Fifteen minutes later, roused by movements about camp, Red crawled from beneath his blankets to find the girl brewing coffee in the chill morning air, while Benson already had struck her tent and was busy rolling it into a pack.

Thirty minutes later a hasty breakfast had been disposed of, patient Old Nig had assumed his burden, and the saddle-horses had been watered and geared.

Swinging up on the pinto, the girl gave Nig's leadrope a halfhitch around her saddlehorn and swung off into the gloom, still following the little valley.

Standing within the little circle of firelight, Benson slapped his boot-top with a rein and looked inquiringly at the puncher, who had already mounted.

"Looks like it's gonna be a nice mornin' fur a ride, Red remarked, after the two had observed each other in a strained silence.

"Uh-huh," Benson grunted. "By the way, which way you ridin'?"

"Don't ask me; show me," Red answered equably, sagging his weight on one stirrup to loot the picturated vest for the makings.

Benson scowled thoughtfuly into the dying fire for a time, then appeared to arrive at a decision. "Awright, son, if you're bound to have it your way, you're plumb welcome t' stick with us. I want to tell you, though, that we're what you might call outlaws, right now, and—"

"Maybe we better shuffle along," Red suggested, striking a match on the horn and turning his head sidewise while he lighted up.

"But you'll git into trouble, shore," Benson warned him. "You know what that means, in this man's country."

"Yes, an' you seen me horn Hollis some-inconsiderate, so we're all even on that. What you know 'bout things on this range you know, an' what I know, I know. One thing we both know

is that they's things goin' on aroun' here that a jughead like Gideon can't handle—even if he's tryin'."

"Gideon's tryin' awright," Benson answered hastily, "but some o' them other jaspers is—"

Benson paused abruptly, stroked the drooping mustaches thoughtfully, then bored the unperturbed puncher with the darting sloe eyes as he added slowly, "Reckon me'n you understands each other pretty well an' Gideon ain't no big puzzle t' either of us."

Benson swung up and put the roach-maned roan into the white winding trail, followed closely by the silver dun. In the bloom ahead, hoofs scraped and leather creaked as the waiting girl started the pinto and packhorse.

A mile of gentle incline, with the walls of the little valley steadily closing and swerving to westward, then the pinto's feet splashed across the stream, and the girl led them up a steep zigzagged path and turned straight south.

Red had been plains raised, so was no mountaineer. Yet he had an instinctive sense of direction. The flare of the match which lighted his second cigaret lighted also a serious young face that wore a puzzled frown. He was vaguely suspicious that since leaving Mesa the Bensons had led him in a circle that lacked little of being complete.

By the time that cigaret had been consumed and another had been lighted from its stub, the first exploring rays of a rising sun had commenced fingering tentatively about the tips of a cluster of lofty pinnacles to southward and a little west of them.

"Topknot, or I'm a Mex sheepherder!" Red confided to the dun's pointed ears.

Only minutes later the arrows of orange light on the highrocks had broadened to glaring inverted funnels as the brass sun swung above the misty plain east and south of them.

Stirring their willing mounts to a rapid jog, the little party climbed to the crest of a dome-like hill, directly west of which rugged Topknot loomed, now revealed in detail.

Winding through the serried pines of the hilltop, the girl jogged steadily down the southern slope, finally turning packhorse and pinto into a little depression on the hillside where alders and mountain ash, with here and there a scrub cedar, screened a little glade where mountain grass stood lush and a rocky basin caught the dribble of a small spring.

Dismounting there, the girl evidenced the characteristics of her sex the world over by letting down her mass of ebon hair and retiring to the shade of a spreading juniper to comb and brush it.

There was little conversation between the menfolk as they ungeared and picketed the horses.

- 4 -

BENSON'S movements were hurried, his seamed face serious as he helped Red stack their traps on a rocky shelf by the spring, then rummaged among the dunnage for a pair of moccasins.

"Better fur rock-scramblin'," he explained, noting a little curiosity in the puncher's eyes. "Ain't got a pair with you, have you?"

"Nope," Red answered. "Pretty nimble in my sockfeet, at a pinch, though."

"Well, it may be a pinch, an' a tight one, at that," Benson prophesied. "Say! Maybe I'd better tell you that—"

"Tell me nothin'," Red cut in. "I notice you're sorta in a rush, so shuffle ahead. I'm stickin'."

"C'mon, then," Benson grunted, rising and heaving the discarded boots on top of the pile of traps.

"You stick here, Bess," he ordered sternly, as he passed her tree.

As the girl only smiled in answer, he stopped to frown at her forbiddingly for a moment. Then the hundreds of tiny smile wrinkles that crisscrossed about the corners of his firm mouth creased as he said whimsically, "Well, do as you durn please then. You will anyway. Be careful though, not t' shoot outa your turn an' mess somethin'."

"Spoilt kid," he informed Red as the two breasted the south wall of the little pocket. "She's got no business here, but she just would come, whether or no. What 'ud you do if you had a gal like that on your hands?"

"Any time you decide that you can't put up with 'er no longer le' me know," Red answered, rearing back on his heels as they left the pocket and took to the brush-clad slope.

Fifty feet down the decline the brush ended on the rim of a low, rocky wall at the foot of which a network of shallow ravines, sand-floored, led to southward and eastward.

As Red had suspected, rugged Topknot loomed sunbathed on their right, while the clustered shanties of Mesa stood out on the baked plain some two miles distant on their left.

The puncher's pipe assisted Benson's cheroot to haze the atmosphere beneath the juniper they had selected for a canopy as they discussed inconsequentials, while the brassy sun climbed higher.

Sprawled under a friendly juniper, Benson rolled to a hip and elbow, tilting the flopped brim of his brown felt hat down to fend off the glare as he gazed intently off to where four dots showed on the trail from Mesa.

"That's the big jugheaded sheriff an' his bunch," Red volunteered.

"Kinda expectin' 'im, wasn't you, Ol' Timer?" he added, grinning broadly.

"Well, I ain't what you might call plumb et up with surprise," Benson admitted, reflecting the puncher's smile. "Say! Ain't you never gonna ask me what the hell we're up to?" he inquired.

"Don't know, and don't care. Furthermore, I ain't been no spoutin' geyser of information myself, so we're all even up to now."

Benson frowned thoughtfully for a moment, then heaved to a sitting posture and pointed a forefinger at the puncher. "Now look here, Mister!" he snapped. "I may squat here all day, or I may slide down there an' mix it with somebody—an' mix it good and hard. As I told you once before, if things comes to a place where you don't feel like—"

"They're fannin' out to give this broken ground a workin' over," Red cut in. "See, that's Gideon on the gray—the one that's turnin' inta the gully next t' the bluff."

"Some eyes you got, son," Benson said, then added, with a note of excitement in his voice, "See Hollis anywheres?"

"Uh-huh. He's—"

"Secont gully?"

"No-o-o. Not yet, anyway. He's motionin' them spindle-shanked twins t' go over south somewheres, so I s'pose he's intendin' t'—Uh-huh. Secont gully, shore 'nuff. He ain't gone in yet but—"

"I got him spotted now. Say, Red! You any good with a rope?"

"Plenty much. Why?"

"Why is that Gideon's comin' at a lope, an—Hey, Bess! Bring two ropes over here, pronto, if not prontoer!"

CATCHING the idea at once, Red had his boots off by the time the nimble-footed girl had burst out of the brush to throw them their ropes.

In another moment he had started to follow Benson down a precarious path that led down the low cliff wall. As he left the rim, Red noted that Hollis had disappeared, presumably into the other gully.

Racing over the hot sand to where the first gully joined the wall, Benson stationed himself on one side, motioning Red to the other. "Hawse's yourn;

the man's mine. Throw when you're ready."

"Ss-sh! He's comin'!"

With his hat pulled low over his eyes and his dusty black neckcloth covering his lower face, the big sheriff rode slouched over the horn.

When a hissing rawhide loop snaked out to settle snugly behind the loping gray's jowl, the rope-wise horse braked to a sliding stop, throwing the surprised sheriff against the horn.

Instinctively following the rope with his eye, Gideon saw it end at the sinewy hands of a lank puncher who held it at his hip and braced with his socked feet to keep it taut. Thinking quickly for once, Gideon set spurs to the unwilling horse and rammed right at the puncher, at the same time clawing at his holster.

The next moment he gave a startled grunt as a whirling coil settled over him, pinioning his massive arms and jerking him out of saddle.

Piling atop the fallen man, Red rolled him over on his face and held him tightly while Benson deftly fettered his wrists and elbows. "Tie that hawse t' a bush, then take this here law-emblem up the bluff an' close-herd 'im!"

"You fellers'll shore pay fur this," Gideon grated, glaring hotly at his captors and heaving at his bonds with his mighty muscles. "When I git loose I'll—"

"Walk," Red directed, crisply, as Benson turned to scramble out of the gully on the far side.

Hazing the big man up the bluff, Red found the girl waiting at the top with Benson's rifle in her hand and her chin set determinedly.

Glancing back toward the flat as he led Gideon into the brush, he saw Benson running swiftly toward the second gully, the one Hollis had entered at the far end.

"Just a second, Miss," he drawled as the girl started to pass.

Tapping one foot impatiently and watching her father closely, she waited uneasily while he bound the sheriff to a tree back of the fringe of brush, then gagged him securely.

"Lend me that rifle, please," Red requested.

"Sorry, but I have use for it," she answered rebelliously, then turned to go down.

IN TWO swift strides the puncher reached her side. Grasping her by the shoulder he swung her around and shook her as one would a naughty child, then wrenched the rifle out of her grasp and shoved her back into the brush.

"Tell you what, Miss Benson," he drawled, evenly and impersonally, "your dad says you're a spoilt kid, dead set on havin' your own way. I'm just that way myself, so one of us is gonna hafta give in. It ain't gonna be me. You foller me down that bluff, an' I'm gonna just nachully take you an' spank you."

"But you wouldn't dare—"

"Try me," he invited, then released his grip and turned his back to catch the rifle by its barrel and slide down the wall without looking back.

Finally she sat down, red-faced and stormy-browed, and sullenly watched Red cross the first gully and race across the burning sands toward where Benson was nearing the second.

Red slowed his headlong rush and proceeded more cautiously when he saw Benson drop to his hands and knees, lifting his shaggy head occasionally to peer into the wash beyond as he crept slowly toward it.

Then Red's attention was drawn by the white peak of a high-crowned hat which bobbed in sight a little way down the wash, proceeded steadily to a spot nearly opposite where Benson was crawling along on all fours, then disappeared as its owner stopped and dismounted.

Rising in the center of the shallow wash at that spot, was a domelike dune

at the top of which a clump of sumac plumed out like a fowl's topknot.

Seeing Benson halt and drop behind a low bush, Red, still a hundred yards behind, followed his example just as the squat deputy's head and shoulders appeared as he climbed the dune afoot.

As his eyes reached the level of the plain Hollis stopped to scan it carefully in all directions, giving particular attention to the gully which Gideon had entered.

Apparently satisfied that no one was in sight, the deputy dropped to his knees and commenced clawing into the hot sand with his hands, right at the roots of the sumac.

Rising and trotting forward, Benson was at the edge of the gully when Hollis rose with a flat, oblong packet in his hand. Slapping sand off it on his trousers' leg, he had opened his shirt to tuck it inside when Benson called, "Easy as you are, Hollis! Stick 'em up, quick!" he added, crisply, as the deputy whirled about in surprise.

Benson started crawling up the near himself down and rolling behind the withdrew his hand from his shirt front with a snap, at the same time throwing crest of the knoll.

As the deputy dropped, Benson took a quick snapshot at him, then swayed back and toppled over with a bullet through his shoulder as Hollis' six spat a spiteful answer.

Changing his gun to his left hand, Benson raked the sumac closely as he reeled weakly to the edge of the gully and dropped down inside, evidently bent upon coming to grips.
flaming hot with fighting spirit, Hollis

Separating and spurring their straining mounts madly, each of the twins circled toward the puncer's flank as he stalked steadily forward, holding his fire, but keeping the rifle trained on

First paling through his tan then the sumac topping the knoll.
side of the little knoll making slow progress, with one arm dangling. He stopped at Red's call. "Circle on 'im, Ol' Timer, an' watch out fur yourself! I'll tend t' them other geezers!"

GETTING within range one of the Prestons wrenched his mount to a sliding stop, dropped off on the far side and crouched to fire under his bronc's neck, only to drop on his face like a stricken beef when the puncher's rifle bellowed angrliy.

Maddened at the sight, the other twin ceased working toward Red's flank and bore straight at him with the reins on the horn and both guns smoking.

With only the gully between them now, Red fired his second shot, coolly and calculatingly, then threw down the rifle and leaped into the swale as his target slumped over his mount's neck, clutched at the horn with weak, groping fingers, then lost seat and rolled to the sand where he lay without a tremor.

As the puncher caught his balance after his leap, Hollis rose from his

sumac, his dark face distorted with rage, his even white teeth flashing between thick lips as he swung a gun above the brush and snarled, "Take that, damn you!"

In that split second the deputy's gun flared straight up as an arrow of fire lanced out from the puncher's hip.

Swaying far back, then fighting his way grimly to an upright position, Hollis set his square jaw and tried to raise his wavering gun for another shot, then folded slowly, joint by joint, and collapsed in an inert heap beside the sumac as the puncher's second bullet crashed into his temple.

"How you ridin', Benson?" Red called, holstering his smoking gun.

"Fair t' middlin'," Benson answered squirming to a sitting posture and grinning wanly. "Don't go near that geezer Hollis! I want Gideon t' see 'im just as he is."

"Oh, Daddy! You hurt bad?" the girl's shrill voice rang down anxiously from the bluff.

"Na-a-w!" Benson bawled back, wincing with the effort. "Got a slug in my shoulder muscles, tha's all! Turn Martindale loose, an' haze 'im down here!"

"Ain't that some risky t' let a gal tackle a job like that?"

"Uh-huh, it's risky," Benson answered, feeling his wound gingerly. "Risky fur Gideon!"

A minute brought the sheriff, black-browed and stern-jawed, tramping ahead of the girl and fairly ablaze with righteous anger.

"Well," he grated gamely, "suppose you damn' blackhearted murderers wanta kill me next, an' make a clean job of it. Go ahead an' crack down. You won't hear me squeal."

"Guess again," Benson came back evenly. "I'm just astin' a little favor that's all. Climb up there and see what Hollis has got inside 'is shirt!"

THE SHERIFF'S heavy jaw sagged as he gazed into the sloe eyes of the little iron-gray man. Finally he mopped his sweat-beaded forehead and north, an' was waitin' fur a chanct t' mumbled dazedly, "You don't mean—"

"Shore do," Benson cut in. "Hollis just dug up the ten thousand he got off Ol' Dick Wade in that statge holdup. I watched him cache the stuff here, yesterday mornin', but I had t' ketch 'im with th' goods on 'im. Go git it. Then you'll know what's what!"

Still, as one in a daze, the bewildered sheriff tramped heavily to the crest of the knoll and bent over his fallen deputy.

Soon he straightened, in his hand the sheaf of bills he had removed from their smudged envelope.

Jerking his star off his suspender, Gideon threw it high and far, then watched it fall, mustering a sheepish grin as he tramped back down the knoll.

"Done sheriffin'," he announced tersely.

"How come?" Red inquired, smiling slowly. "Ain't you just ketched a stage robber an' recovered the swag, at that?"

"No, I ain't," Gideon answered glumly. "The way folks'll tell it is that my pet deputy went and got ketched by a—er—by—"

"By Lone Wolf Benson, head detective fur the express company in charge of this here division," Benson supplied helpfully.

"One bad thing though, Red," Benson added, scowling a little uneasily. "'Course I'm a officer, but you—Wall, it's too damn' bad you went and plugged them two youngsters plumb dead. Both of 'em was officers, so—"

"Onct more we're all even," Red came back, unperturbed, slanting a shrewd eye at the girl's worried face. "I'm special investigator fur the Cattleraisers' Association, an' them two red-headed, toad-specked sons-of-guns was rustlers, along with Hollis. I trailed 'em down here after the last raid over

north, and was waitin' for a chance t' abduct 'em, knowin' that Gideon wouldn't give 'em up.

"You go git that star, Gideon," he said, "an' keep right on sheriffin'. All the dear public needs t' know is that Hollis packed your posse with crooks headed by hisself, an' you got onto 'im an' got us t' help you smear 'em!"

SADDLED and mounted, the three on the hill watched a rolling brown dust cloud creep lazily into the Mesa trail—a dust cloud raised by the sheriff followed by three horses, each carrying a body.

With no tie-rope on him this time, fat, contented Nig nipped playfully at the pinto's flank. A little way ahead Benson twisted around in saddle to rest a hand on the roan's sleek flank and look past the girl to where the puncher sat, rolling his inevitable cigaret.

"Us fur home—an' fur good, at that," Benson announced soberly, then explained in answer to the puncher's look of inquiry, "I promised Bess that this 'ud be my last trip out after 'em.

"Maybe just as well, at that," he added, a little sorrowfully. "Reckon I'm gittin' too old t' handle myself just right. Comin' plumb clean, I'm spoutin' it that Hollis 'ud a got me shore, if it hadn't been fur you. Furdermore, if he didn't, them damn' twins would. Ho-hum! Well, as I was sayin', we're ramblin' fur our ranch over in the short grass southeast of Pueblo. Couldn't be that you could shack along over there with us an' rest up fur a spell—if you kin spare the time?"

With his hands cupped about a flaming match, Red allowed it to blaze unnoticed as he looked past it, straight into the eyes of the girl.

"Ride, folks," he drawled, gathering up his rein, then adding impudently as the smiling girl blushed rosy under his steady scrutiny, "Seems like we orter git better acquainted, so I reckon I kin spare you a little time. Say a billion years, or somethin' like that."

★

15 Complete Triggerfast Stories 15

And the new issue features

THE LAWDOGS

A Marshal Sergeant Novel

by Wadsworth Ne aley

THE ROLLING STONE

Latest Lee Winters story

by Lon Williams

ABLE CAIN'S WAGON RACE

by A. A. Baker

Special Feature stories of the Old West
by WHITE EAGLE and HAROLD GLUCK

All in the June issue of

REAL WESTERN STORIES

There's a difference between being willing to face danger, and being willing to go to certain death for an uncertain advantage.

MARSHAL AND TARGET

by GEORGE HUDSON SMITH

OLD WALT EDWIN grinned at Cal Powers as he carefully measured two fingers of bourbon into a glass. "Nope, I don't reckon that Star City ever had a marshal that lasted more than two weeks—leastwise, not so long as I been here."

"I guess not," the young deputy marshal agreed glumly and downed his drink in one quick gulp.

"So why do you want to keep that badge on? Someone's liable to shoot you just to see what color blood you got."

"Well, I kinda like to finish a job when I hire out for it," Cal said glancing around uneasily.

"Bosh! Only way you'll finish this job is to get yourself shot," the tavern keeper said putting away the bottle and wiping off the bar with a dirty rag.

"Can't help it, Walt, that's just the way I feel," Cal said. He suspected that Walt saw through his big talk; the old man had been around too long to be so easily fooled. He knew that Cal worshipped the dust that Betty David stirred up when she walked, and that Betty's father had worn a badge to his death in the street right outside the window of Walt's bar. He probably also knew that Cal had only taken the marshal's job to impress Betty—and was now stuck with it, because he wouldn't admit that he was afraid of a town that was as hard on peace officers as this one was.

"Boy, this town needs a tophand to ride herd on it with a gun. No reflection intended, but you just ain't the man. The trail herds'll start coming in before the end of the week and with 'em will be the toughest bunch of hombres that ever forked a bronc. Bill David was a good man with a gun and he lasted just two weeks; you won't last a night." The old man polished viciously with the bar rag to emphasize his words.

"Things'll be different when Sam Forester hits town. There ain't a liquored up cowpoke in the state who'd buck Sam," Cal said, some of his confidence returning.

"Yeah, *if* he gets here, you mean. He was supposed to show up a week ago

and where is he? Maybe even Sam Forester don't want the job of Marshal of Star City; leastwise he ain't in any hurry to come get it."

"Sam'll show up. Sam's the fastest, fightenest man with a gun this part of the country ever saw," Cal said. "He cleaned up Dry Forks in a week and he can do the same for Star City."

"Yeah, yeah—maybe. Maybe so, but there just ain't no percentage in it. A guy like Sam can go just so far. He might knock off a killer one day, and then some drunk'll shoot him in the back."

"Not Sam. Sam's indestructible," Cal said. "He'll keep going 'til he retires to a peaceful old age."

"Humph! He must be pretty near ready for that now, ain't he? Seems like he's been around for a mighty long time."

"Naw, not so long. Let's see...my paw rode in a posse with him back in...well, anyway, he's still going damn strong," Cal finished lamely.

WALT GLANCED past Cal's head out the window behind him. "Here comes your lady friend, and by the look of her, I'd say she was wonderin' why you ain't out patrolling the street in the noonday sun."

Cal flipped a coin to the old man and turned to leave. "See you later, Walt."

"Yeah; if you live long enough," Walt called after him.

Betty David hurried down the boardwalk toward Cal as he left the saloon. From the look on her pretty face he knew that trouble was coming; her blue eyes flashed fire and there was a pinched look about her full red mouth. "So that's where you've been all afternoon," she greeted him, "Hiding out in Walt's saloon."

"Not hiding out, Betty; I just been sitting talking to Walt."

"And drinking, no doubt. Sitting there drinking and talking while the man who killed my father is in town."

"Joe Reiso's in town? I don't believe it; you must be mistaken."

"I saw him ride in with Bull Rice and his crowd from the B-bar-R. They're down at the *Silver Eagle* right now, drinking and laughing about the Marshal who hasn't enough nerve to show his face when they're in town," Betty said angrily her eyes flicking contemptuously over Cal's lean figure.

"Now look here, Betty, there ain't no call to talk that way. After all, I'm only the Deputy Marshal; Sam Forsterer'll be here pretty quick, and everything will get into line."

"And until then murderers can walk around town scot-free because the so-called Deputy Marshal is afraid to face them!"

"Now, Betty, be reasonable. What chance would I have against Reiso when he's got Bull and his boys to back him up?"

"A chance to prove that you're a man and not a coward!"

Cal's face flushed hotly but he said nothing. He could understand her point of view. She had seen her father shot down before her eyes while he was trying to enforce the law. Cal had reason to hate his murderer; and maybe she had reason to expect the man who loved her to at least try to revenge her father's death. But did she have the right, he wondered, to ask any man to get himself killed when he could do no good by it.

"If you won't think of how *I* feel, knowing that man is sitting down there drinking and laughing at the decent people of this town, you might think about this Forester you admire so much. What would he think of his deputy if he knew he was afraid to arrest a killer?"

"Sam wouldn't ask a man to throw away his life to no good purpose," Cal said quietly.

"I'm not asking you to throw away your life," Betty said intensely, her fingers digging into Cal's arm. "I'm only asking you to arrest or kill Joe Reiso, if you love me. I can't love a

man I can't admire and... I can't admire a coward."

"But Betty...I'm not...it's just that..."

"If you don't go down to the *Silver Eagle* right now and do your duty, I don't ever expect to speak to you again as long as I live!" She whirled on her heels and walked away.

"Coward, am I?" Cal muttered to himself as he loosened his Colt in its holster.

It was two blocks to the *Silver Eagle* from Walt's place. For the whole two blocks, Cal's mind kept telling him to turn back, that there would be five or six to his one. What profit to get killed in a fight against odds like that? But the word "coward" was still stinging him, and he kept going—slowly at first, and then faster and faster in a desire to get it over with while he still had the nerve and his hands were still steady enough to hold a gun. If it were only Joe Reiso he wouldn't have hesitated for a minute, but he knew that Bull Rice would back any play that Reiso made, and that Bull's riders were expert gunmen.

HE REACHED the *Silver Eagle*, slowly opened the bat wings and stepped in out of the glaring sun. He stood for a moment to let his eyes adjust to the comparative darkness within and then looked around for Reiso and Rice, his body braced all the while for a bullet. He cursed himself for a fool for ever walking through the door. He was no coward but neither was he a hero or a professional gunfighter. And even if he had been, he knew he had no chance now; he was almost ready to curse the woman who had sent him here.

"Looking for someone, Powers?" came a voice from one of the indistinct figures at the bar. Cal had hoped that Betty was wrong but it was unmistakably Joe Reiso's voice. His vision was better now, and he could see them—Bull Rice and Joe Reiso, standing side by side. His glance swung swiftly and he saw three of Bull's riders at the other end of the bar and a fourth standing by the piano. Six to one. Six professional gunmen to one unsure cowboy with a Deputy Marshal's badge making a shining target on his shirt.

"Yeah, I'm looking for you Reiso," Cal said, surprised at the steadiness of his voice as he started slowly forward.

"Well here I am, Mr. Marshal; come and get me," Reiso laughed with his hands still on the bar. He could afford this sort of bravado, because Rice's men all had their hands on their guns.

"Reiso, I'm here to arrest you for the murder of Marshal David," Cal said, his hand hanging just over his gun. In a minute he would have to draw and then he knew he would die in a hail of bullets. He heard the scraping of chairs as patrons of the *Silver Eagle* cleared the line of fire.

Reiso let go of his drink and turned with his back to the bar. Bull Rice, a huge blond stocky man, was bent forward in a slight crouch. "Powers, I don't think you're man enough," Reiso snarled. "If you pull that gun, I'll kill you."

Cal took another step forward. If he could just get close enough he might be able to get Reiso before the others got him. Maybe then Betty would feel differently about him.

"Why don't we just kill him anyway, Joe?" Rice said. "This town don't need no marshal."

This was it. He could almost feel the gunmen tense their muscles and his brain sent an order to his gun hand but before his hand could obey, the batwings behind him burst open and someone yelled almost in his ear. "Hey, the stage just came in and Sam Forester is on it!"

"Forester?" Reiso gasped. His gun had been halfway out and he slid it quietly back into place. Bull Rice relaxed and leaned back against the bar.

"What the hell is Forester doing here?" Reiso asked his eyes wide.

"Forester is the new Marshal, Reiso," Cal said moving toward them, his hand still on his gun even though he knew now that he wouldn't have to draw it, "I sent for him." Having seen that the power of the man's name and reputation could halt death itself Cal continued, "I'm taking you in, Reiso."

"Like hell you are," the little man growled but Rice's big hand reached out and caught his before he could draw.

"Take it easy, Joe," he said softly; "you heard him. Forester is the new Marshal, and I ain't backin' your hand against him."

"Well, I ain't lettin' this punk take me in for no murder," Reiso protested.

"Better go along with him for now." Rice said. "You won't be in for long."

"But, Bull, I. . ."

"Go along; I'll think of something."

"Drop your gunbelt on the floor, Reiso, and step away from it," Cal commanded, still hardly daring to believe what was happening. Reiso looked once more at Bull, then slowly unbuckled his belt and let it slide to the floor. Even more slowly he stepped away from it and watched bitterly as Cal scooped it up.

"All right, Reiso; let's go," Cal said, and waited until the other man moved out ahead of him. For the first time since he entered through those swinging doors, Cal breathed easily. *If* that stage hadn't come when it did; and *if* somebody hadn't taken it on himself to tell everybody in town that Forester was on it, he'd be lying on the floor with his blood soaking the sawdust of the *Silver Eagle*. He couldn't help wondering how Betty would have felt then.

HE HAD EXPECTED to find Sam waiting for him at his office; but there was no sign of the lawman when he prodded Joe Reiso through the door and into the lock-up behind.

"I won't be here long," the little gunman said cockily as Cal turned the key in the lock of the cell.

"No, not long, Reiso," Cal said calmly. "Just as long as it takes to get a Circuit Judge here, round up a jury, and find a good strong tree to hoist you on."

"Bull Rice is married to my sister; he won't let you frame me."

"Remember, Joe, Sam Forester is in town. Rice and his crowd will be running for the hill if I know them," Cal said just as Walt came hurrying in clutching a shotgun.

"Heard you was in trouble," the old man said. "So I closed up and came a'running'."

"No, no trouble at all," Cal told him. "Sam Forester is in town."

"Well, I'll be derned!" the old man said in admiration. "You got Reiso in jail."

"Right. And how would you like to keep an eye on him while I go down to the hotel to see Forester?"

"I'd like that real fine, I shore would," the old saloon keeper patted his shotgun. "Maybe I'll get a chance to use this on him."

A few minutes later Cal was inquiring at the desk of Star City's only hotel for Sam Forester.

"Sure thing, Cal," the clerk said. "Him and his kid is up in 204; he said not to let anybody but you come up."

"Sam said that?" Cal asked, puzzled. Sam had a lot of friends in Star City, and it was strange that he wouldn't want them to come to his room. It was also peculiar that Sam hadn't come straight to the Marshal's office.

"Naw, Sam didn't say it, the kid did," the clerk said. "Sam didn't say anything that I recall; just went on up to his room."

"Well, anyway, I'll go on up," Cal said and took the stairs two at a time in his eagerness to see his father's old friend. He slowed down, though, as he approached the room for he could hear voices coming from the open door of 204.

"But, Kit, please, I got to have a drink. Look at me, look at how my

hands shake; you wouldn't want no one to see me like this, would you?" a querulous voice pleaded. It was a voice that sounded familiar and yet unfamiliar to Cal.

"Not now, Pa, not now," a lower, more urgent voice said. "You know what'll happen if you start drinking now. You gotta get this job, Pa; we can't go farther without money."

"But they want a gunfighter, Kit, and I ain't no gunfighter any more. Look at my hands shake; I tell you I got to have a drink."

"No, not now, Pa," the youthful voice said firmly as Cal entered to find Sam Forester sprawled on the bed with a slim figure in jeans bending over him.

Even looking at him Cal wasn't sure it was the same man. The once-straight, strong figure was wasted and the clear, sure eyes he remembered as a boy were swollen and bloodshot.

"Sam...Sam..." was all he could say.

The figure on the bed got slowly to its feet. "Cal. How are you, boy?" He reached out a hand which Cal grasped quickly to stop its trembling. "It's good to see you, Cal," Sam said sinking back onto the bed. "This is my kid...my daughter, Kit."

FOR THE first time since entering the room, Cal took his eyes away from the wreck that had been Sam Forester, and saw that the youth in jeans was a girl in her late teens. "Sam isn't very well today, Mr. Powers," she said defensively.

"You don't have to lie to Cal, girl; he can see. Besides I've known him since he was a button."

"But I don't understand, Sam. What's the matter."

"It's just the way it is, that's all." His voice grew querulous again. "How about that bottle, Kit? I got to have a drink."

The girl with a sigh took a bottle from one of the two battered pieces of luggage on the floor and handed it to her father.

"Here's how," Sam said and swallowed almost a fourth of it. "That's better. That's better. Be feelin' like the old Sam pretty quick..."

Cal stood staring as the man took two more huge swigs of the whiskey. He couldn't say anything. All he could do was think about the way he had admired this man for so long and the hopes he had placed in his coming.

"Now 'bout this job, Cal. 'Bout this job. It ain't no gunfighter's job, is it, Cal? I've retired you know. Ain't got no time for gunfighting no more...not no more...got too many big deals coming. Sure could use a job though to carry us over 'til they come through. Sure could use a little money, too. Got any money on you, Cal?"

Cal dug into his pocket and handed all the bills in it to the man. Kit promptly reached over and took them away, counted off a few and gave the rest back to Cal.

"This'll be a loan until Sam gets to work," she said simply but not without a trace of shame. "We need it to pay for this room."

"'Bout this job, Cal..." Sam said sleepily.

"Maybe we better talk about it later," Kit said. "Later when you're feeling better, Sam. I'll walk downstairs with Mr. Powers and pay the room clerk."

As they stepped out into the hallway Cal saw Sam raise the bottle to his lips again and noted that it was more than half empty.

"What happened? How did he get this way?" he demanded of Kit as soon as they were alone.

The girl looked at him steadily for a moment and then shrugged slim shoulders. "A man in Sam's business can go just so far on nerves alone—and something cracks. It started a couple of years ago, right after I came back from the East. Sam always made good money and he sent me away to school. I

didn't know he made it by setting himself up as a target for every killer and gunman in the west. I didn't even know that he was a gunman himself—always on the side of the law but a gunman just the same. Anyway about the time I came back he had a couple of narrow escapes, and once he got a bullet in his shoulder...from the back. That was the only time in his life he ever backed down from a gunfight.

The girl's dark hair framed her pale face in the dim light of the hallway and Cal could see her lips tighten. "I didn't care," she went on, "and most of his friends understood but...well, I guess Sam didn't understand himself because he's never been the same since. He always was a drinking man but now... well...you saw, yourself."

"Yes...yes, I saw. But how is he when he's sober?"

Kit laughed bitterly. "I haven't seen him more sober than he was when you walked in for over a year. And when he is, he has the shakes."

"Lord! That leaves me in a spot; we wanted Sam for town Marshal."

"Sam can hardly *hold* a gun, much less use one," Kit said.

They were in the lobby of the hotel now and Sam felt as though everyone in the place was one of Rice's gunmen, waiting to find out about Sam and then put a bullet into his Deputy.

"I guess Sam and I just might as well not unpack. It looks like we'll be moving right on again," the girl went on. " 'Cause Sam won't be any good to himself or anyone else as town Marshal any more."

"No, I guess not," Cal said, so absorbed in his own troubles that he didn't even notice the tears in the girl's dark eyes.

"We'll leave as soon as possible," she said; "we don't want to cost you any more money that we have to."

"Don't worry about the money," Cal said thinking that he probably wouldn't have any use for it anyway after Rice and his crowd found out. "Well, I'll drop in to see you and Sam again before you leave."

"Sure...sure, drop in; we always like to see old friends," the girl whispered bitterly to his retreating back.

THE ONLY thing that kept Cal from flinching as he stepped out into the street was the thought that Rice couldn't possibly have heard about Sam already. Rumors maybe—but not enough to make him certain. But even with this temporarily comforting thought in mind Cal couldn't help searching the street for possible gunmen. But instead he saw Betty David coming toward him from the direction of the jail.

"Cal, Cal, I've heard about what you did in the *Silver Eagle,* and I'm so proud of you." She came very close to him, so close that he could smell the perfume of her hair; his hands reached of their own free will and pulled her closer still as his lips came down on hers.

For one short moment she gave way to his kiss before pushing him away. "Please, Cal; people will see us."

"I'm sorry. I forgot where we were and I was afraid I might never get another chance."

"Why don't be silly. Now that Reiso is in jail, we'll be seeing a lot of each other."

"Yeah, I guess so," Cal agreed, wondering just how long Reiso would still be in jail. He looked up as three horsemen rode by with packs and rolls on their horses. "The Taylor brothers and Slick Bates," he noted aloud. "I wonder where they're going."

"Haven't you heard? They're leaving town. Six or seven of the worst characters in Star City have left within the last hour," Betty said. "Ever since they heard that Sam Forester was in town, they've been pulling out."

Cal snapped his fingers. "Have they now? Well then, maybe, just maybe things are going to work out all right after all."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"I'll tell you later," he called over his shoulder as he headed back toward the hotel at a run.

Kit was still standing in the lobby when he burst into the building. Quickly he took her arm and led her upstairs. "Has anyone seen Sam? Does anyone in town know about him?"

"No. Sam didn't want any of his old friends to see him the way he is."

"Good. Thank God for that," Cal breathed.

"What difference does it make now?" the girl asked as they arrived at the door to her room; "we're leaving first thing in the morning."

"No, no. You can't. You've got to stay. Sam's going to be Marshal."

The girl's eyes widened and she said, "Mr. Powers, have you been drinking too?"

"No, I haven't—and Sam's got to be Marshal. Tell me, can you get him up and around and looking half-way fit at least once a day?"

"I...don't know. He's so bad now that I just don't know. Is it really important?"

"Important? Girl, it's a matter of life or death," Cal said and grabbed her by the shoulders. He was suddenly conscious of the warmth of her young body under the thin denim shirt.

"Whose life and whose death?" she asked skeptically, pulling away.

"Mine—and maybe those of a lot of other people in this town."

"What did the people of this town ever do for us?"

"Look, Sam's a lawman; even though he may have lost his nerve, and taken to drink, I'll bet if you asked him, he'd want to do it."

"Do what?"

"Just stand around looking like the old Sam for a few hours a day while I use his reputation to clean up this town."

A GRUDGING look of respect came into the girl's eyes. "What a crazy idea. You're lookin' to get yourself killed, mister."

"I'm probably dead, anyway," he grinned; "but this way, I at least got a chance."

"I don't know. I don't think Sam can do it."

"Listen to me, Kit," Cal pleaded, taking her by the shoulders again. "This town has been run by people like Bull Rice, the Taylor brothers and Joe Reiso for too long. In the last few years, decent settlers have been moving in—and with the backing of the ranchers they made Bill David marshal and me his deputy. David was killed in cold blood, and I've had to lay low; that's why I sent for Sam in the first place."

"And now you find that Sam is worthless," the girl said softly. She was very close to him now and he could feel the sadness and shame beneath the words. How different she was from Betty David, who thought only of her own personal revenge and was willing to sacrifice his life—or anyone else's—to satisfy it. He could see now that she had deliberately called him a coward to provoke him into action and then had rewarded him with one brief kiss. And here was this girl who hardly knew him mourning the fact that her father was unable to help him. His arms pulled her closer and he almost whispered into her ear.

"But Sam *isn't* worthless. Already he has put Reiso in jail and run the Taylor brothers out of town."

Kit's head came up and she smiled for the first time since he'd met her. "Thanks, Cal. I'll try to pull him together." She stirred in his arms and her lips met his. This time there was no coldness, and no pulling away—but a warm, frank answer to his caresses.

"Kit...Kit," he murmured into her hair, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that."

"But I did, Cal, I did."

"Hey! What's going on here?" It was Sam standing in the doorway and holding onto it for support.

Cal recovered quickly, steered Sam back into the room as he said, "Sam you're the new marshal of Star City and you've just started a campaign to run every crook and gunman out of town."

"Wha's 'at?"

"Get coffee," Cal directed Kit. "Start sobering him up. He won't have to do much; just walk down the street so they can see him in the next hour or so."

"Where are you going?"

"Me? I'm going to round up Walt Edwin and we're going to move right down Front Street and we're gonna run every crook and gunman out of town."

"Oh Cal! It's an awful chance to take."

"But it's our only chance; and with Sam to back me it's not much of a chance at all."

Sam was sober enough to take in what was being said, and now he said, "Cal...I can't. I ain't no good. I lost what I had, and..."

Cal put his hand on the older man's shoulder. "That's all right, Sam; no one can keep going forever. You did more in your time than any other man I ever heard of. Everybody wears out sooner or later. We don't need your gun, Sam; we just need your reputation."

Sam's head fell forward and what he mumbled was incoherent.

Cal turned to Kit. "I've got to go now; I'm depending on you." He kissed her gently and hurried down the stairs.

HALF AN hour later, Front Street was in an uproar. Cal, with Walt Edwin and his shotgun at his back, had walked into one bar after another and stood at the door until he caught the attention of everyone in the place. What he said then was brief but effective.

"Sam Forester is the new Marshal and he's determined to clean up Star City. Anyone who wants to hang around can meet him out in the street in a half hour or so. He'll be coming down Front Street then, and any of you who don't care to make his acquaintance had better hit the leather."

Even when the trail herds passed nearby, Star City had not known such excitement. Outlaws and gunmen, petty thieves and crooked gamblers eased themselves out of back doors, found horses and headed out of town.

Sid Laurent, however, was made of different metal; he had killed a drunken cowboy with a concealed derringer a few months before, and consequently was one of the top names on Cal's mental list of local hombres who had to go.

"Who the hell are you, Powers, to order me out of town," he demanded from his usual place at a table in the *Silver Eagle*.

"I'm not ordering you out of town, Laurent; I'm suggesting that you and the new marshal, Sam Forester, might not get on too well."

"I haven't even seen Forester," the gambler sneered. "How do I know he's in town?"

"Just hang around," Walt said. "You'll find out soon enough that he is."

Laurent's hand hovered near his waist, but the steel blue barrel of the shotgun kept it under control.

"Far as I know," said a soft-voiced man Cal recognized as one of Rice's riders, "*no one* has seen Forester."

"Look out in the street, then," Walt said from the doorway. "He's a'comin' straight down Front Street and heading this way."

Rice's gunman got to his feet in one swift movement and moved to the swinging doors beside Walt to peer out. "It's Forester all right," he reported; "walking down the street like it was Sunday—with a girl at his side."

"All right; all right, Powers, I'm getting out," Laurent said sliding his chair back so quickly that it crashed to the floor with a noise that wakened the few sleeping drunks in the bar. "I'll be out of town by sundown."

"See that you are," Cal called after him before turning to Rice's rider. "You can tell Rice that that goes for him too," he just finished saying when the door swung open and Sam Forester walked in with Kit dragging at his arm and trying to hold him back.

"Sorry, Cal. Got to have a drink," Sam said moving erratically across the sawdust covered floor. "Gotta have a drink right now." He displayed his trembling hands. "Look at me. I'm shaking to death. Gotta have a drink."

"Oh Lord," Cal moaned. This tore it and he knew it. Rice's man had taken it all in and now hurried out of the saloon.

"Gotta have a drink, Cal...you wouldn't let me shake to pieces, would you?"

Kit let go of her father's arm and came over to Cal. "I'm sorry, Cal, but I just couldn't keep him walking up and down any more."

Cal put his arm around the girl. "I guess we never should have tried it, honey. It's not your fault...I should have known better."

He glanced at Walt over Kit's shoulder. "Bull and his boys will be heading for the jail to get Reiso out. I'm going to try to stop them."

"You're a dang fool if you do," the old man said.

"I've gone too far now to turn back. Either I finish cleaning up Star City or...else."

"Wal if you're that determined, let's go. Quit lallygagging with that gal and let's go."

"Who said you were going? You head for cover."

"Sonny, you ain't seen the day when a few gunmen can make Walt Edwin run for cover."

"All right," Cal smiled, "Let's go then, oldtimer."

"Cal...Cal, don't. There's too many of them. They'll..."

Cal stopped her with a kiss. "Take care of Sam, sweetheart, and I'll see you later." He tossed some money onto the bar as he went out. "Let him have whatever he wants," he told the bartender nodding toward Sam.

As he went out the door Kit was talking earnestly to her father, who was busy gulping down his first drink.

BULL RICE and three of his boys were coming down the street toward them when Cal and Walt reached the jail, and there wasn't any doubt about what they intended.

"I reckon we might just as well stand here and let them come to us," Walt said. "It plumb wears a man out to go runnin' to get killed."

"Four to two," Cal mused. "That's not so bad; it was much worse at the *Silver Eagle* before."

"Out of my way, Powers," Rice yelled. "We're comin' to get Reiso out."

"I'll give you five minutes to throw down your guns and get out of here," Cal shouted back, "or I'll lock you up with him."

"Don't try to bluff me any more. We know that Forester is through. He couldn't hold a gun if he tried to."

"But *I* can, Rice," Cal said.

"And I can, too," Walt yelled. "You see this scattergun, Bull? It's aimed right at your big belly."

Rice laughed. He was standing well beyond the effective range of the shotgun and he knew it. He drew his own gun and his men followed suit.

"Drop it, Rice, drop it!" a voice called.

Rice whirled to face the figure which stood swaying with twin guns held in unsteady hands. Cal's gun barked at the precise moment Rice's did and he and Walt ran toward their three remaining opponents.

"It's Forester...get him!" one of the gunmen yelled and all but one of them fired at the swaying figure. Walt blasted that one with his shotgun, and Cal got Rice and one of the others. But Forester was down, too, and his guns fell from his hands without his having been able to fire a shot. The last re-

maining killer threw down his gun and raised his hands in token of surrender.

As Cal slipped his Colt back into its holster he realized that only the unexpected appearance of Forester had saved them. The fear that the man instilled in the gunmen by his presence, even then, had unnerved them and drawn their fire; that had enabled him and Walt to drop them.

"Bull's dead and so's this other one," Walt reported to Cal who was now bending over Sam. "The one over on the walk might make it if he's lucky."

"Sam caught a couple of hot ones," Cal said.

"He sure did, boy...he sure did," Sam said faintly, opening his eyes. "I wanted to help, but I couldn't even get off a shot, Cal."

"You did help, Sam; you helped a lot," Cal reassured him as his eyes fluttered shut again.

"He cain't hear you, son," Walt said quietly from behind him.

Cal stood up wearily. "He did his best, Walt, to make up for not coming through before."

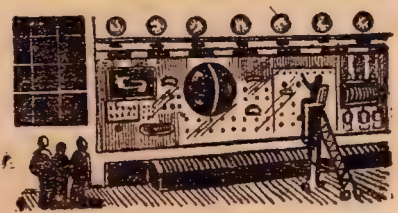
"Yeah, I guess he did," the old man said. "And here comes that daughter of his. You better go meet her while I take this fellow that's still on his feet to keep Reiso company."

Slowly Cal turned to meet the hurrying Kit. It wasn't until she was crying in his arms that he remembered that he was supposed to meet Betty that evening. He didn't think he'd go; in fact, he didn't think he'd ever go there again.

"Sam's gone, Kit, and I'm sorry," he said pulling her closer. "He saved us by making a target out of himself."

"Maybe...maybe he liked himself better that way, than the way he was," Kit said through her tears, as Cal gently tried to kiss them away.

★



Adventures in Space and Time

★ *Robert Randall,* a name you'll remember, leads off the issue with a novelet you won't forget—

NO FUTURE IN THIS.

★ *Robert Abernathy* is author of the story from which Emsh painted the cover — ONE OF THEM?

★ Plus other stories, and our regular features and readers' departments

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

still only 25¢ — May issue now on sale at all stands

Bill Devlin had to kill a man who refused to defend himself!

BULLETS BURY THE PAST

by LEE FLOREN

SLOWLY BILL DEVLIN levelled the big .45; he pointed the Colt at the back of Mack Clayson's head as the merchant stood and looked out the window. From somewhere—evidently from the rear of the store—came the sound of a woman singing in a low and throaty voice, her song completely out of harmony with the grim scene taking place in Mack Clayson's office.

Bill Devlin tried not to let the song effect him, but it did.

He cocked the .45; the click was loud. He stood with his gun-arm rigid, elbow made of cast metal. He stood like that for a long moment—ready to send a bullet crashing from behind through Clayson's brain—and the song was in his ears, soothing and low and beautiful.

Now Clayson turned and looked at the gun.

"Why don't you shoot me, Bill?"

He was a short man, this Mack Clayson, and he wore a neat blue suit that fitted him, giving his wide shoulders even more width. Time had run its sharp chisel across the wide face, and Time had changed that face a lot in the last four years; Devlin noticed this fact again. But it was the merchant's eyes that fascinated him; they were deep blue and calm, despite impending Death.

Hard thoughts tugged at Devlin, giving his lips a tightness. Forty-five level, legs braced wide, he looked at Clayson, their eyes meeting. And the woman still sang, unmindful of this drama taking place in this dingy office.

Clayson spoke in a low whisper. "You came here to kill me, Bill. Shoot and get it over with, Devlin."

Devlin thought, *That song is breaking me...* Was it a mother singing her baby to sleep? He thought, *A baby takes a nap every day...about this time... Damn it, why didn't she stop?*

"Why don't you pack a gun?" Devlin asked.

Was that his voice—rough, ragged, stern?

Clayson watched the .45. No emotion, no fear, no hate—just nothing; waiting for Death. This calmness—and that damned song—

These broke Mike Devlin. He low-

ered the gun. "I can't kill you in cold blood, Clayson. Why don't you get your gun—fight it out with me?"

"No, Bill."

Clayson crossed the room and sank into the chair behind the desk. Devlin moved to the window; he looked out on Singletree town. Dust and a rutted mainstreet, with old buildings; but he didn't see the dust, or the unpainted boards.

"I should've let thet hammer drop."

Clayson said nothing.

"You never gave my ol' man a chance; you shot him down in cold blood."

CLAYSON'S FACE showed pain, and the woman kept on singing. Devlin cocked his head and listened: He decided he liked that low-voiced song; he jerked a thumb toward the closed door.

The woman was beyond that door.

"Who?" he asked.

"My wife," Mack Clayson said, "singing to the child. About time for his nap." He looked up, eyes heavy now. "Who told you I was a storekeeper here in Singletree, Bill?"

"Fellow named Hank Williams. Dogtown, way beyond the ridge. Williams runs a saloon there."

"I see."

Anger ran through Bill Devlin. For four years he had looked forward to this meeting; now, Clayson would not fight. Clayson wouldn't pull the gun out of his drawer there in the desk; he woudn't rise out of that chair with the gun roaring and smoking. Devlin was tense and tough, inner conflict driving more darkness into his face.

"You've looked for me for a long time, Devlin?"

"Four years."

Clayson said, "I won't fight you, Devlin."

"You gone yellow?"

"I have no reason to fight you."

Two strides took Mike Devlin across the room. He tore the grocer out of the chair, and he hit him and he hit him hard. Satisfaction was his as his knuckles smashed Clayson's nose and brought blood.

Clayson flung up a stocky forearm, but twice more the left fist of Mike Devlin smashed the grocer in the face. Then Devlin let him drop to the floor where Clayson lay and groaned slightly.

Breath whistling, Devlin looked at the man, lying there on his side, blood on the floor. Satisfaction changed then to disgust. The sight of a coward, backing water, was not pleasant, and never had been.

Clayson sat up, said, "You'll be sorry you did this, Devlin."

"Get a gun!" Devlin was hoarse. "Get a gun—and come out fightin'! Before sundown, come out with a gun!"

He turned to go.

He stopped.

For the door to the store had opened, and a young woman stood there. In her arms she held a little boy of about two, Devlin figured. She was, in her way, very pretty—this prettiness was dark and mature and full. And now, terror was in her eyes, giving them wild disorder.

"My God, Mack, what happened?"

MACK CLAYSON got to his feet and went to his chair and sat down. He held his handkerchief to his face and he spoke around it. "I picked the trouble with this fellow, Mary. He owes me some money—I pushed him too hard—"

"You have too much temper, Mack." The woman spoke to Devlin. "Here, you hold Billy, please?"

She handed Devlin the boy. Devlin took him with awkward shyness, wondering when and where he had last held a child. The ironical thought came that this whole thing had gone haywire, the branding-irons had got mixed. He had come to Singletree to kill Mack Clayson.

And here he stood holding Clayson's little son.

"Come with me," Mrs. Clayton told her husband.

They left.

The boy looked at Devlin. He had blue deep eyes. He said nothing. Then he started to fumble with the button on Devlin's shirt-pocket. He got Devlin's durham sack.

Devlin said, "Too young for that," and got the sack back.

The boy watched him, eyes wide. Then the child said, "I like you," and he put his soft boy-arms around Devlin's neck.

Devlin liked the hug.

The mother came back and took her son. "I must apologize for my husband's temper; he told me it was all his fault."

Devlin felt futile and confused. "Was that you singing...a while ago?" Why did he ask that?

She frowned. "Yes?"

"You have a nice voice."

"Thank you."

Devlin watched her walk away. She had a nice figure—thin waist and wide hips. The thought came, *I'm going to kill her husband. I'm going to kill that little boy's father.* He remembered her calmness on entering the room. Her husband had been bleeding from the nose; most women would have been excited.

Devlin thought, *She's a yard wide and all wool.*

Devlin left the office, then. He walked through the store proper, stepped around a counter filled with bolts of new cloth. He smelled prunes and dried apples, and he saw the red candies.

Clayson had a good store, evidently a good business. There was bitterness for Devlin in that thought.

He remembered the mother's lullaby.

DEVLIN stood on the plank sidewalk and he pulled the sweet prairie air into his lungs and he remembered other things, too.

Why couldn't a man forget?

Square Mike Devlin had run a bank there in Arizona on the rim of the *chamiso* and the sand. And Mack Clayson had worked for Square Mike.

Then there had come that red day when they had found Square Mike dead with the ugly bullet hole in his head, from behind; and there had come the day when the trusted Mack Clayson had disappeared. Devlin had sold his father's bank and had hit the trail.

Now he was in Singletree, and Mack Clayson would not fight.

That was the irony of it all, damn it. Why didn't Clayson get his gun—why didn't he come out shooting?

A voice inside said, *"You can turn Clayson over to the local Law. The Law will return him to Arizona and a murder charge."*

Four years had gone by...four long years. Witnesses had died or had moved. And Clayson had money...he might beat the trial. Money can buy lawyers, and money can change honest men into liars.

Forty thousand dollars, the bank examiners had reported—that was the size of the loss.

Behind him was this fine store. Devlin turned and was sick inside, and he knew where the money had gone.

A man came lurching, a little drunk, and Devlin tried to move to one side, but he was too slow, and the man shouldered him.

"Excuse me all to hell," Devlin said, and grinned.

There was nothing serious about it—just a cowman loaded down a little too much, nothing more. But the man wanted more. He stopped, legs wide. "You tried to knock me down!"

Devlin was raw and under tension. When he hit, it was not because this man was what he was. He hit because he wanted to strike out, lash out at something, some man, something solid. Frustration rode him with cruel spurs.

The man made his reach, but the fist drove him back and lifted his arm. Devlin had that arm, then, holding the

man against the store, and Devlin said, "Don't try to lift a gun on me, you bustard!"

"God, you're breaking my arm!"

The fingers loosened, spreading out; the .45 fell to the planks. Devlin's boot slithered in, hit the gun, and sent it skidding into the dust.

Devlin stepped back, sanity returning. He felt better, though.

"After this, don't run against strangers," he warned; "some are dangerous."

The eyes were gray with hate and they measured him. Cunning came in and turned the gray to brown hardness and when the man spoke he was holding his red anger back under heavy ropes. "Your name, Stranger?"

"For what it is worth, it is Bill Devlin."

The thick lips repeated, "Bill Devlin," and this forced the pattern into the brain, outlining it there.

"Clayson—he's your friend?" And a thumb jerked toward the store's door.

"I'm going to kill Mack Clayson."

"Oh."

Devlin said, "Move on, man."

But the man was solid, part of the earth. "You rode into town...about a half hour ago. One of my men saw you ride in. A big sorrel stud."

Devlin nodded. "Move."

"You'll ride out...after you kill Clayson?"

"Move, I said."

The man said, "If you leave I won't have to kill you, Devlin. And Clayson might kill you and spare me the job."

"I might not ride out."

"That is your decision." The man moved a pace, turned, asked, "By midnight?"

"Midnight is fine for me."

The man went into the store.

Devlin heard him say, "I have quite an order for the ranch. Here, clerk, is the list."

Devlin walked down the street.

A MAN CAME toward him; Devlin noticed he carried two guns and he saw a hawked-nose and a pointed ugly face.

He jerked a flat thumb toward the store. "Virg Trate in there?" It was no question; it was a demand.

"You go in and look for yourself," Devlin said.

The man looked at him, then went into Clayson's store. Devlin moved on, then he almost stopped. She was singing again to her child, and this stirred him with old longings, desire he had thought dead. But the inner side of a man comes through, and in the coarseness there is light and brightness, and this song brought these from Devlin, pulling them from the dark recesses.

God, I wish she'd quit singing.

He went into the cafe, took a stool, and noticed he was the only customer. The waitress was young and light-haired and beautiful and Devlin almost told her these facts, but he did not for he calculated that she had been told them in jest too many times before.

"The washbasin is behind the kitchen on a bench."

"Blood?"

"A little."

Devlin washed and wondered whose blood it had been. He had drawn no blood from the rancher, so evidently it had come from Clayson. Devlin thought of the rancher and remembered he had smelled of whiskey; the man had gone out of his way to pick trouble with him.

Devlin wondered about this.

His meal awaited him.

The girl moved over and looked out the front window and Devlin admired her straight back and full hips. "Winter will soon be here," she said.

"Yes?"

"I hate snow and cold."

Two men came out of Clayson's store. "Who are they?"

"The one you hit is Virg Trate; the thin man is the Denver Kid. He works for Trate."

"Who is this Trate man?"

"Oh, he owns the biggest ranch around here, the D Bar S. He came to Singletree a few years ago with Mr. Clayson. Some people say he owns the store and they say the Claysons just run it for him."

"He must have money."

"Yes, he came with money." The girl looked at him; "they are coming this way."

"I'll cause no trouble."

"Thank you."

Devlin thought this over. Clayson and Trate. An odd wedding of personalities, he decided.

Devlin laid his .45 beside his plate.

The thought came, and it was this: *Devlin, you tipped your hand when you told Trate you aimed to kill Mack Clayson. Devlin, you used your tongue too much; yes, you did.*

Trate looked at the gun. "We never come for trouble." He put his bottom on a stool. "You got till tonight."

"Midnight," Devlin said.

THE DENVER KID slid his thin bottom on a stool, too. He did this without effort; he flowed onto the seat. He looked at the .45. He looked at Bill Devlin. He looked at the waitress.

"How are you, Sweetheart?"

Devlin thought, *They buy a four-bit dinner and they think for half a buck they get the waitress thrown in, too.* He finished eating and paid and went outside, holstering his gun.

Behind him he heard a silky voice said, "He takes no chances, Trate."

Trate did not answer.

Devlin heard the Denver Kid say, "He don't like us, Trate."

Again, no answer from Trate.

Again, the Kid spoke. "I think he's a yellow bustard, Trate."

Devlin turned and came into the cafe and his gun was limp in his hand. Devlin said, "I know a skunk when I see one—even if he wears pants and packs two big bad guns."

The Denver Kid said, "You got the edge; your gun is out."

Devlin holstered the gun. "Not now."

The girl had wide eyes; she was against the backbar.

There was this moment—raw and ugly—and then Virg Trate brought his hand down, using it as a hatchet across the arm of his gunman.

"Not in here, Denver."

The Denver Kid turned on his stool. "Not in here, the boss said," he repeated, and he had no more eyes for Bill Devlin.

Devlin went outside, smiling.

ALREADY the air held a chill for night was moving down from the western mountains with their snow and glaciers. Somewhere a cow—evidently a milk cow—bawled; somewhere a dog barked; and somewhere an eagle circled an icy crag. Devlin threw his head back and sucked in the air and remembered.

An hour ago, he had walked into Clayson's office, and the man had been working on his books, just as he had worked on Square Mike's ledgers and day-books.

He had not looked up. "Who is it, and what do you want?"

Evidently he had figured that a clerk was behind him. "Bill Devlin, Clayson."

"Devlin. Bill...Devlin." The reality turned him around in the chair; reality and surprise turned his face yellow-clay.

"Get your gun, Clayson, and start shooting!"

"I never pack a gun."

Devlin had enjoyed rare anger. "Your kind never do; that is because they are safer without a weapon. Then they can crawfish out of trouble."

He had jerked open the top-drawer in the desk.

A Colts .44 had been there.

"Take it up, and use it—like you did against the back of my father's head, Clayson!"

But Clayson had got to his feet, holding his hands back. "I never killed Square Mike, Bill. I swear by my Savior—I never murdered your father, Bill Devlin!"

"You lie!"

"I'll swear it on the Bible."

"You still lie; if you didn't, why did you run?"

"I didn't murder Square Mike."

Mack Clayson had walked to the window. Devlin had turned and aimed the gun at the back of the man's head.

But that woman...she had started singing.

DEVLIN remembered Virg Trate. He had not been drunk; yet he had deliberately stumbled against him.

Devlin thought, *To hell with all of them.*

He would go to the sheriff, tell his story, and the lawman would have to arrest Mack Clayson. Then a picture moved across the mind and memory of Bill Devlin, and it was the picture of a mother and her little boy.

When Clayson had worked for Square Mike, he had been unmarried. He and Devlin had courted the Wilson sisters together; he had been a good friend to Devlin, and that had made the blow even harder.

Devlin thought, *I should have killed him. Blowed out the back of his scheming ugly skull.*

His footsteps had taken him to the town livery-stable. The hostler was not around and the smell of horses—the smell of manure, of fresh hay, of sweaty gear—came to him. He had taken two lumps of sugar from the cafe. Now the sorrel stud arched his proud neck, nickering softly, lips flipping on Devlin's hand. Then he chewed the sugar, smashing it with grass-green teeth.

Overhead, doves cooed in the haymow.

"Devlin?"

Devlin turned, surprised, and he said, "This way, girl," and the little shadow came in saying, "The light is bad and I couldn't see you at first."

Devlin had thought, at first, it was the little waitress, but the shadow moved closer, and he recognized Mrs. Clayson.

"Yes."

"Are you—leaving, Devlin?"

"No." A pause. "How did you know my name?"

"Mack told me...finally."

"What else did your husband tell you?"

She had a soft, sweet perfume. "Mack and I have been man and wife for three years. He's told me—told me before we were married. It hasn't been easy on my man, either."

Devlin was cynical. "That is logical; murder burns in a man's memory, I suppose."

"You misunderstand me."

"Oh?"

"You never gave Mack a chance to talk, he told me; he's tried to contact you, Devlin."

"Contact—me?"

"Yes. He left word with Williams—who told you in Dogtown."

Devlin was silent, lips vised.

"Say something, please, Devlin?"

"What is there to say, Missus Clayson?"

She was close to breaking. He felt that, he sensed it; the air held it. "Mack has held nothing back from me."

"Why didn't he tell you who I was...when you came in the office after I hit him?"

"He was surprised, and stunned."

"A murderer," Devlin said.

"Mack is a silent man, Devlin. He has never told you this, but when he worked for your father in the bank Mack was an ex-convict."

"He never told me."

"Three years in Colorado pen."

"Was he—did he—serve his time?"

"He broke jail."

"Then when he worked in dad's bank he was a wanted man?"

"Yes."

"We were close...and he never told me."

"He loved your father; he told me so. But another man—in the pen with Mack— Well, he broke with this outlaw. Your dad took him in—gave him his chance—"

"And he paid him by murdering him."

"No."

"Who killed Square Mike, then?"

"This other man—this border outlaw— He came into town and saw Mack working in the bank— He killed your father!"

Devlin had her by the shoulders.

"You—hurt me, Devlin!"

DEVLIN let his hands drop. "Oh, God," he said, and he was praying. "Oh, God, if it is only true."

He voice held hope. "It *is* true; this man robbed the bank. Mack got afraid—he had to leave— A trial would show he was an ex-convict. He had to leave, Devlin."

"Why didn't he come...see me? Talk to me?"

"You were out of town, he said. Remember?"

"Yes, the telegram got me in Lordsburg," Devlin said.

"You believe me, Devlin? Tell me you believe me?"

Devlin had dried ashes in his mouth. He had ice-water in his heart; his belly was made of sick lead.

But she was right. Had they captured Mack Clayson he would have been lynched. Square Mike had had hundreds of friends; these friends would have done to Mack Clayson what he himself had done—they would not have given the man a chance to explain.

Devlin spoke from a distance. "Who is this border raider? Where is he, Mary?"

"He's in this town. He followed Mack north. He's got Mack under his thumb. His money owns the store."

"Who—is—he?"

She told him.

SHE LEFT then, small and a mother, and Devlin put his head against the proud thick mane of the stud; he Devlin knew then the feeling of Terrible anguish, and he knew other things, too. These became clear and they straightened incidents, and they built up and made logic.

The stud nuzzled him, wanting attention.

Devlin stroked the wide nose with its flaring nostrils. Then he said, "Goodby horse," and he added, "I hope I come back," and he went outside. The wind had lifted, and it had a chill, and this made him button his vest, but the gesture was automatic, nothing more.

He came into the cafe.

The little waitress was washing dishes in the back. She came in wiping her hands on her apron.

"Sir?"

"I'm looking for a man," Devlin said.

"Who?"

"Virg Trate."

"He just left."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know. But he hangs out in the *Cinch Ring*."

"A saloon?"

"Yes, down the street about five buildings."

"Thanks."

She looked at him. He looked at her.

"A man," he said, "is an odd, odd animal."

"So they tell me."

She watched him go out the door. Outside he glanced through the big front window. She still watched him.

YELLOW LIGHT from kerosene lamps moved out of windows and touched the tawny boot-beaten plank walk. Across the street a shadow took life and moved and Devlin stepped back into the darkness.

The shadow went between two buildings and out of sight.

Devlin watched for a while, then moved on again. He pushed through the yellow rectangles of lamplight and moved aside the doors of the *Cinch Ring* and went inside.

Virg Trate stood at the bar and the Denver Kid was at Trate's right elbow. Two old pensioneers played cards at a side table.

Trate turned and the Denver Kid turned.

Devlin said, "You've seen me before, Trate?"

Suspicion chiseled Trate's face. "I have? Where?"

"Arizona. Marysville."

"I've never been in Arizona."

The bartender watched. Devlin spoke to him next. "Get those two old men and clear out, bartender."

"Why?"

"You might get killed."

"Smoky Jim. Bill Glaswell. Get out of here with me."

They went out the door. Devlin did not watch them. Devlin heard Bill Glaswell say, "We'll send the sheriff down."

The door whipped shut, sagged, made a squeaky sound, was still.

Trate said, "Speak up, stranger."

"Not stranger. . . to you, Trate."

"What do you mean by what you just said?"

Devlin watched the Denver Kid. "You murdered a man in Marysville, a little over four years ago. I was the fool and so was Mack Clayson. Clayson is sick inside, and he's afraid of you —but his wife told me."

"I don't like this man," the Denver Kid murmured.

Trate said, "Go on, Devlin."

"Clayson will go on the witness stand against you, Trate."

"He'll go back to Colorado pen, if he does."

"He knows that; but he'll testify against you."

"I don't believe that. He's feathering and a coward."

Devlin shook his head slowly. His hand were damp. "He'll go to the pen, but you'll hang for murdering Square Mike Devlin."

The Denver Kid said, "I'm in on this, Devlin."

"How deep?"

"I draw pay from Trate; he buys my loyalty."

Devlin scoffed. "You have no loyalty."

"I've got some thousand invested in this, too," the Denver Kid said. "We got a nice set-up here and—"

It happened, then.

The Denver Kid matched thousands of dollars against of hours of lift, of level, of fire. The dogs snarled and rolled, the tableau froze into solid brittleness, then the solidness broke, and the dogs snarled again and fanged. And through this came this thought to Devlin and the thought was this: *Trate has had plenty of time.*

TRATE HAD his hammer back, and had his .45 raised. Trate would kill him, and Devlin braced for the shock, but the bullet never hit.

For Trate was bending at the hips and his right hand was out and Trate slowly and beautifully opened his fingers and the .45 went down and reached the dusty floor.

Trate turned his head and went down.

And Devlin turned. Mack Clayson stood there and Clayson had a double-barreled twelve-guage pump gun.

Clayson looked at him.

"I killed him," Clayson said.

"You did."

"The Denver Kid?"

"I've practiced a lot," Devlin said.

Clayson swung his head, smile gaining strength. "You shouldn't have gone against two of them."

"I never thought the Kid would horn in."

Clayson lifted his eyes. Relief torched across them. "Mary told me. I'm going back to Arizona; I'll stand trial for helping in that robbery. I'll go back to the Colorado pen."

Devlin watched him. "Why?"

"Because—well—Hell, Devlin, it's the thing to do."

"I don't think so. Now only three of us know—you and Mary and me. Square Mike is dead. A jail term would do you no good; hell, you've gone through it, Mack."

"You mean that, Devlin?"

"Yes."

Clayson let his breath leave him in a great gulp. "The sheriff will want to talk to us, Bill. Come on home with me?"

Devlin shook his head. He remembered her standing there watching him as he had walked out of the cafe door. He turned and walked toward the cafe. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee," he said.

★

4 Suspenseful Mysteries

THE REPULSIVE CORPSE
by Louis Trimble

THE DEVIL'S FOOTPRINTS
by August Derleth

SOMETHING SPECIAL
by John Eugene Hasty
(*creator of "Dr. Christian"*)

SMART GUY
by Don De Boe

lead off the big 4th pocket-size issue of

DOUBLE ACTION DETECTIVE STORIES

If your dealer is sold out, send 35¢ to COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 241 Church St., New York 13, N. Y.

Old Bob Lambert, near the end of the trail, had no more desire for vengeance — no longer cared who had bushwhacked him. He just wanted Mark Webb to help with the ranch until Sally could take over. But Mark was determined to find out the whys and wherefores of Lambert's shooting nonetheless...

FOR VENGEANCE ALONE

Novelet of Rangeland Destiny

by LAURAN PAINE

LODGEPOLE was a small hub of buildings, garnished by an immense sea of land that rolled and ebbed off toward the horizon; there, shadowy, jagged mountains rose up out of the land and acted as a buffer and a chain of sentries between the town's homliness and the world beyond. As a town, or village, Lodgepole left much to be desired; but even so, it had that evasive, errant something that draws men—and women, too—to towns. Maybe it was the need for groceries, beans and flour and coffee; but if that was so, then why did they stay in town after they were through shopping? No; Lodgepole, like other little frontier settlements, was more than a town. It was a state of mind—a compelling urge within its scattered citizens—tossed by their own peculiar fates out across the ageless rangeland —to congregate and visit and talk.

Parson Rigby sat in the shade of his honeysuckle arbor, and his eyes were grave and pensive. He felt not alone exactly, but certainly lonely in the tremendous sweep of the earth that waved its first spring time shoots of wiry, tough buffalo grass at him from as far, and much farther, than he could see. The Parson was a rawboned, youngish man with gentle, wistful eyes. He didn't condemn his Mission for sending him to Lodgepole; he was too good a Christian for that. But he did wish

they'd sent him somewhere else where souls were easier to save, and not quite so barbaric.

He leaned back against the stiff, unrelenting green hide that was the back of his chair. There was a saying about 'a little bit of knowledge being more dangerous than a lot'. It was true in another sense, too; a little bit of civilization was more dangerous than a lot of civilization. In Lodgepole—where the men swore mightily, carried guns swinging rythmically at their hips, stomped thresholds with scuffed, calloused feet enclosed in boots that jingled musically with heavy, cruel spurs adorned with inlaid silver—there was little room for anything except harshness.

The Parson was new to the West, and its jarring intimacy and idiosyncrasies had fairly taken his breath away. He was like a little boy who was suddenly pushed into the dark—awed, uneasy and not a little frightened; but, too, there was something way down inside of him that couldn't be completely stifled. He felt a rising well of kinship with the glories of the land and the strict, unbending code of the West.

The Parson was lost in his somber reveries when he noticed a man riding into Lodgepole from the South. Every stranger was an interesting study to Rigby and he looked this one over with the professional interest of a confirmed soul-saver. The rider looked like the others. From the dented crown of his adobe colored Stetson—grey with dust and alkali powder—to his ornate Californio spurs, he was a Westerner. His face was broad, clean looking and wary. Rigby nodded to himself. Naturally the stranger would have to be like the others; no one but a plainsman would deliberately ride to Lodgepole. This man, like the others, did things without thinking ahead. They weren't necessarily mean or cruel, any of them, but just foolish—with the hairbrained lack of tact that set them apart as a species.

He shrugged to himself. Very often the difference between being deliberately bad, and just plain foolish, was slight; maybe there wasn't a difference between the two at all, because the results were nearly always the same. The Parson was surprised, though, when the rider tied up at his fence, loosened his front cinch as if he meant to stay awhile, kicked open the sagging, warped gate and entered the scraggly yard before the house.

VERY DELIBERATELY, the man swung up the little plank walk toward where Rigby was sitting. The Parson got up and waited; he was curious. None of the cowmen or the riders came to see him, alone. They didn't exactly avoid him; but unless their wives were with them, they just didn't come visiting very often. And even with their wives along, they never acted at ease or comfortable.

"Parson Rigby?"

The man's voice was soft, well-modulated. Rigby sensed something in this man that was different, after all. He nodded with a smile and motioned toward a bench beside him. The stranger thumbed his swear-stained hat to the back of his head and some auburn hair showed damp and clinging on his forehead where the skin was whiter than the face below it. The man sank down to the bench, reached deliberately into a shirt pocket, fished out a tobacco sack and held it hesitatingly for a moment as his deep set, thoughtful grey eyes looked up.

"Mind?"

"Not at all." Rigby knew the ways of these people. When the stranger was good and ready, he'd introduce himself and get down to business. It apparently was a custom they'd adopted from the Indians: Never hurry; never lose your dignity. He watched the man roll his cigaret, light it and exhale a fragrant cloud of bluish smoke into the clear, warm air.

"My name's Webb, Mark Webb."

Webb apparently was going to say more, but Rigby interrupted him with an outstretched hand and a smile. "I'm glad to know you Mister Webb." Webb looked a little startled and embarrassed, but he dutifully pumped the Parson's white hand and dropped it.

"I was just passing through this country, on my way to Nogales, when I was stopped by a girl a few miles South of here, an' asked if I'd ride to Lodgepole an' ask you to come right quick to the Rafter L spread."

Rigby knew what the message meant. Old Bob Lambert had been dying for several months, the result of a rifle ball in his back. Apparently he was very near the end, now. Sally Lambert had met the stranger, asked him to come to the Parson with the message, and quite likely had gone back to the Rafter L to wait. He brought his eyes back to the cowboy and nodded slowly. "Bob's near the end of the trail."

He said it matter-of-factly, sadly, and the cowboy nodded too. "Yeah. I figured it was something like that."

"Do you know the Lamberts"

Webb flushed a little. "No," he said ruefully, "but folks don't usually send for the Sky-Pilot unless it's a birth or a death; the girl wasn't wearin' no wedding ring, so I figured someone in her family was cashin' in."

RIGBY NODDED approvingly. Mark Webb fitted into the mould the Parson had mentally built for him—Observant, quiet, and very deadly. But he couldn't shake off the feeling that Webb was different, some way, too. He mused aloud as the sun baked into his shoulders and the honeysuckle spread it's ambrosia through the dry air.

"Bob Lambert's been a big man in this country; he's one of the oldtimers, Indian fighter and all that. 'Pretty wealthy too, I'm told. His wife died several years ago, and Sally's been all that's left to him outside of his cattle and his thousands of acres."

Webb was listening with casual interest. "What's he dyin' from?"

"Some months back, he went out to look over his stock—to see how far they were drifting I guess. When he came back, he was draped over his horse half-conscious. Someone had shot him from ambush and the ball nicked his backbone and went on into his insides. He didn't know who did it, and no one else had been able to figure it out—including Sheriff Molden."

"No stock run off? No bad blood? No robbery?" Webb's eyes were puckered at the edges.

Riby sighed as he got up. "No reason at all, so far as anyone can figure out." He started to move toward his little barn behind the house, hesitated and faced Webb. "But the bullet's in too risky a spot to be removed and Bob's been slowly dying from it. I guess his time has come, now."

Mark Webb got up, flicked the cigaret away and looked down at his sinewy hands. "Well, dammit, I wish I knew what to say, Parson; but I don't, so I'll just drift." They shook hands and the rider went back to his horse, tightened his cinch, swung aboard and turned casually toward the main section of Lodgepole. It was too late to head back out across country anyway; the afternoon sun was sliding toward the distant peaks; so he rode to the Gregg House, tied up, went in and registered. Then he took his horse to a livery barn before he went to his room and flopped on the hard, bumpy bed, eyes wide open and staring at the fly specked ceiling.

After five months after wild horses over on the Llano Estacado, the girl was like a breath of fresh air. He pushed his arms under his head and stared harder at the ceiling. Even Nogales wouldn't have anything like her. He thought of the Parson and grinned wry-

ly. It'd been a long time since he'd seen one; a lot longer since he'd talked to one. His thoughts swung to the dying man. Why in hell would someone just shoot a man in the back? People just didn't go around shooting other people without a reason; it's too risky a pastime. The old fellow must have made a damned good enemy.

Lord but that girl was beautiful. Her hair was like fresh taffy and she rode a horse like it was part of her. He'd never forget how she came loping up out of the dead distance of the endless range. He'd been startled for a moment at seeing any one, but when she got closer and stopped and talked to him, his eyes had drunk in the sight of her like a man dying of thirst. He grunted, showed himself off the disagreeable bed and started to strip. That's all civilization was good for, anyway—beds and warm baths.

- 2 -

THE NIGHT was pleasant and fragrant when he went out on the Gregg House's porch and slumped into a vacant rocker after a mediocre dinner of liver and onions. Lights flickered and beckoned with orange fingers from the saloons and dance halls and blinked out, one at a time, from the commercial establishments. It was nice to sit in the warm gloom like a shadow and watch the trickle of humanity that flowed across the dusty roadway and on the cracked, weathered plank sidewalk. Mark Webb rolled a cigaret and let the sense of well-being that having a bath always brought to him, completely encompass him with its feeling of stolen luxury.

There were other chairs on the veranda, and other men sat in them, dark silhouettes in the late dusk. Webb could smell their pipes, cigars and cigarets. They seemed relaxed, too, and in their drowsiness he felt companionship—although he had spoken to no one since registering. Civilization didn't seem such a bad thing from the comfort and gloomy security of the veranda, but his thoughtful eyes looked at the saloon lights and a cynical hardness flitted across them. In those smelly, noisy, rooms were human wolves waiting for the kill. That, too, was a part of civilization.

Several of the other rocker occupants had drifted inside and that made Mark think that perhaps it was getting late. He settled deeper into his chair and the urgent, compelling face of Sally Lambert came up out of his memory again. He inspected it objectively, there in the darkness, with complete safety; and the closer he looked, the less fault he could find. There was no denying it; she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Mark was so completely lost in his reverie that he didn't notice the man walking up the veranda steps. He didn't notice him at all until a hand was laid on his shoulder, then he started half out of his chair and his holstered .45 was cool and reassuring under his fingers.

"Mister Webb?"

Mark sank back slowly, irritably. The Parson. Bad enough to have his dream interrupted, but to be startled half out of his wits was worse. He was on the verge of spitting out an unpleasant comment about the foolishness of creeping up on people, when the Parson sat down and leaned forward as he spoke. "It was a shot in the dark."

Mark nodded to himself grimly; it damned near was that, all right.

"But I thought I might find you here, so I rode over," continued Rigby.

"Well, your guess was pretty good at that, Parson. After I left you, I figured it was too late to head back; so I came on in an' got a bath an' a dinner." He thought of the Parson's visit

to the dying man. "How's your patient?"

RIGBY'S ELBOWS rested on his upper legs as he leaned forward. "Not quite as bad as Sally thought he was, but he's no better. Ah, Mister Webb—"

That "Mister Webb" business was beginning to rankle a little. "Parson, just call me Mark, will you? Every time you say 'Mister Webb', I want to look around an' see if my Dad's standin' behind me."

Rigby smiled weakly at the intended humor. "All right, Mark." He let a two second lapse intervene. "I have a question to ask you."

"Yeah? Fire away."

"Would you find it convenient, since you apparently aren't working right now, to hire out to the Rafter L?"

She had liked what she saw, too; it must be that, because he hadn't met her father. In fact, he hadn't met any one else all day long as he rode over the range. "Does she—I mean does Miss Lambert need a rider?"

"She needs more than that, Mark. She needs help and guidance and comfort. I can give her spiritual guidance and comfort; but I know less than nothing about cattle, and I'd rather hoped you'd help me in that."

"Then the idea was yours, not hers?"

"Yes; but she agreed that she'd have to find someone to work on the ranch steady, now that her father can't."

Another cigaret was in the making, and the hands that rolled it were oddly damp with perspiration. There was a shot of irritation and self reproach running lightly through the cowboy. He'd been silly to presume. To hell with it; he was going to Nogales where he had friends. He wasn't going to bury himself in an adobe and mud wattle pigsty like Lodepole—not even for the most beautiful, most desirable, most wonderful woman he'd ever seen in his life.

"I'll ride out there first thing in the mornin' Parson, an' talk to the girl."

Rigby left with a light step and a small smile. The ways of the Lord were good. The Rafter L would have a man at the healm again; and, unless he was very much mistaken, it would have just the kind of a man it needed. Fearless, capable and dogged. The Parson meant to arise early and ride out with Mark and introduce him to Sally. He felt particularly good—so good in fact that when he got to his cottage and made a pot of coffee prior to going to bed, he poured a dab of rum in it before he drank it. The Parson felt kindness toward Lodgepole and its rough citizens, as he got into bed; and for the first time since coming West, he was conscious of really contributing something tangible to the woes of his domain.

WHEN RIGBY'S fat mare stopped before the Rafter L rambling old adobe house, the Parson felt a twinge of disappointment. Tied in the shade of a tired looking old olive tree was the leggy, lean and hard looking gelding bearing the plain, flesh-out, sloping cantled saddle of Mark Webb. He recognised them even before Sally Lambert and Webb came off the veranda to welcome him. His disappointment passed quickly when he saw the radiant look on the girl's face and the lean, wary smile the cowboy wore.

"Parson, you're wonderful; I had no idea you were so forceful. Why, I was hardly up before Mister Webb rode in."

Rigby caught the "Mister" and looked at the pained cowboy with high amusement. He spoke as he swung off the grey mare, who was already closing her placid eyes, preparatory to a little nap in the warm morning sunlight. "Sally, he distinctly doesn't like being called 'Mister'. May I suggest you call him just plain 'Mark'?"

Mark was standing a little to one side of, and behind the girl. He saw the flecks of gold sparkle in her taffy hair as she swung her head around goodnaturedly and a little wave of admiration got out of control and swished

around inside of him. "Is that true, Mister, Webb—er, Mark?"

He nodded, smiling, and the three of them entered the cool old house.

The Parson looked inquiringly at the girl. "Has he met Bob yet?"

"No: Dad's not awake yet. In fact, I'm ashamed to say it; but I haven't been up long enough to get any breakfast." She faced Mark and he noticed that her eyes were not more than three inches lower than his. "Mister, ah, Mark, won't you and the Parson have some breakfast with me?"

She didn't wait for the selfconscious nods of the two men before she was walking toward the kitchen. "Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. I'll have it ready in a jiffy."

Mark looked at the minister, and Rigby looked at the cowboy. Mark shrugged and sank into an old leather chair while the Parson sat on the edge of an occasional chair made of age darkened hickory. Somewhere in the back of the house a bell rang softly and Sally Lambert swished through the room with a smile. The Parson watched her go by and turned to Mark. "That's Bob's hand bell; he's awake."

Mark nodded and thought to himself that it would be quite a feat for a man to ring a bell if he wasn't awake. Sally came to the doorway and beckoned. "Dad wants to see you two."

They followed the girl to the sick room, where a large, rawboned old man was lying perfectly flat in a black old mahogany bed, with only the outlines of the covers to show that, once, there had been a massive and powerful body behind the drive and impulses of Bob Lambert. His blue eyes were large and direct and Mark recognized Sally's features there in the weathered, seamed old face beneath the shock of disheveled white hair.

"This is Mark Webb, Dad. You know Parson Rigby." The eyes were clear and questioning, which was a surprise to Mark, who had expected a half-conscious, quivering man in the throes of a lingering death.

"Glad to know you, Mark. Sit down, gentlemen."

They sat in silence and Sally left the room. The man's eyes made a rapid appraisal of Mark and swung to Rigby. "Well, Parson, it was right considerate of you to get this man for us; Lord knows we need a good man."

The frosty blue eyes ran quickly over Mark's frame again. "Well, young man, you look like you'll do." Mark blushed uncomfortably under the direct stare.

"It's not hard work. Not until we round-up; then we'll get extra hands. But it does take a lot of ridin' to keep Rafter L cattle from driftin' too far away." The shrewd eyes were a little grim as he continued. "Then, of course, there's the chance of gettin' a slug in the back; an' that's generally enough to make an hombre keep his eyes open, ain't it?"

Mark wanted to laugh at the old man's laconic statement and dry humor. He found himself warming up to Bob Lambert. "Well, it'll keep me from stayin' too long in one place when I'm ridin', anyway."

Lambert's pale face grinned a tiny bit. He too liked grim humor, and he liked something else, too, when he saw it; and now it was sitting on a chair next to his bed. Courage.

- 3 -

SALLY CALLED them to breakfast and they left the wounded man. Mark felt a distinct twinge of pity as he walked into the kitchen where both he and the Parson washed, slicked down their hair and plunked into hard seated chairs at the kitchen table.

Sally poured the coffee and the men

ate. Mark couldn't shake off the feeling of anger that possessed him; bushwhacking was the lowest, sneakiest form of shooting he could think of. Finally he put the knife and fork down and looked at Sally. "Who the devil would do a thing like that?" He jerked his head in the direction of her Father's room.

She shrugged curtly. "I'd like to know."

Mark was frowning. "Sally, people don't just go ridin' around blastin' other folk for sport. There's a reason somewhere, an' you or your Dad ought to have an idea about it."

Sally Lambert understood the frustration and irritation in Mark's voice and her own heavy eyebrows drew into a slight frown. "Well, we don't. Dad was riding toward the border, looking for cattle that might get too close to the Mexican line. If strays drift over into Mexico, it takes a lot of red tape to get 'em back; so we always try to see that they don't get that far South. He didn't find any Rafter L cattle, and was coming home by way of Tiburcio Rocks when someone shot him. He managed to hang on until he got home and that's all we know about it."

Mark was building his inevitable cigaret. "Where's Tiburcio Rocks?"

"About two miles Southwest. It's a jumble of rocks that make a small hill. That's undoubtedly where the assassin hid; it's about the only place on our range where a man could hide himself and a horse. The rest of our land is open."

"Does your land run to the border?"

"Yes: as soon as we've finished eating, I'll ride the ranch with you; an' then you'll know what's Rafter L and what isn't."

PARSON RIGBY sat on his grey mare with a comfortably bulging paunch; being a bachelor, he had made excellent use of his time at the Rafter L breakfast table. A truly benevolent smile was on his face as he waved goodby to Sally Lambert and Mark, and he headed back for Lodgepole while they swung away for their ride of the Rafter L domain.

Mark approved of the cattle he saw. They were in good flesh and fetlock deep in rich grass. The bulls were breedy; the cows picked commercial, or grade critters; and the calves, clean and frisky, showed the playful, curious disposition that proves their parents are getting plenty to eat. He nodded to himself. Bob Lambert may have been an oldtimer in the Lodgepole country, but he certainly wasn't hidebound like most oldtimers. His ranch and his livestock showed that he was a modern cow man.

Mark was so absorbed with the cattle, and the great expanse of Rafter L grass, that when Sally spoke he started slightly in the saddle. "There's Tiburcio Rocks."

Mark rode among the boulders, apparently dumped there by a whimsical, pre-historic destiny—for nowhere else, as far as the eye could see, were there any boulders on the prairie. He dismounted and poked with his boot-toe among the shale. He suddenly caught sight of the glitter that he'd been looking for, bent over and retreived a brass cartridge.

Sally came up close beside him and stared wide eyed at the sinister little object lying in the palm of Mark's hand. He ficked it over and grunted.

"What is it?"

Mark's narrowed eyes studied the cartridge case a second longer before he stowed it in a shirt pocket and turned toward the girl. "It tells us one thing, anyway; the bushwhacker was a Mexican."

"How do you know?"

"Gringos don't use Mauser rifles."

They rode in silence for a long time. The range they were riding was free of cattle, and Sally pointed to little sun-blistered white posts stuck up at intervals across the range.

"Those are the United States, Mexi-

can border markers. On the other side is Mexico."

Mark looked indifferently at the markers. "Did your Paw ever bump into any Mex 'alambristas', or smugglers or rustlers?"

"Oh yes. Dad's been in this country most of his life, and in that time he's seen 'em come and go. But we don't think it was a spite shooting; the renegades Dad's tangled with are all old men now—as old as he is—and he hasn't seen any outlaws at all now, for ten years or so."

"This part of the border's pretty quiet, then, huh?"

"Yes: Sheriff Molden at Lodgepole, the United States Marshal at Nogales, and the Mexican Rurales all patrol it. Even so, though, they don't have much to do any more. There haven't been any smugglers or revolutionists cross here for years."

Mark's eyes were grave and thoughtful. "Let's get back to the ranch, shall we?"

Mark left the girl at the house, where he wrote a long and laboriously articulate letter—for him—and asked Sally to take it to Lodgepole and mail it. He explained that it was to friends in Nogales, telling them that he'd been detained en route.

IT TOOK several days to familiarize himself with the Rafter L, and the more he saw of the great, sprawling ranch, the better Mark liked it. In the evenings, when Sally had the hissing, brilliant lanterns going Webb spent his time alternately playing cards with Sally and standing at the foot of Bob Lambert's bed—first on one foot then the other—talking and listening to the wounded man. Lambert couldn't raise his head, and Mark stood over the end of the bed so the older man could see him without moving. His respect for old Bob grew to almost rival his admiration for Sally; and in a way, there was something more compelling in his feelings for the older man than for the daughter.

Lambert had spent a lifetime building and carving and holding his ranch. It was a labor of love that had taken its toll in sweat and years; and now he had to lie there waiting for an agonising end and before he cashed in. He had to live with the knowledge that his empire would crumble with his passing, because he had no one but a girl to leave it to. Mark Webb knew these things because he, too, was working toward a spread of his own; and the certain knowledge of the tribulations and sorrows that beset a rancher were imbedded in him.

"Bob, the coyote who knocked you over was a Mex." He held up the Mauser cartridge. "We don't use Mausers this side of the border."

Lambert's eyes were a little bitter and wholly indifferent. "It don't make much difference any more, Mark; I'll never get up again, so revenge won't do me any good."

The direct, blue eyes stared up at the blank ceiling. "When a man's got to stare at a damned ceiling all day long, an' most o' the night, he gets to look at things differently. Don't bother huntin' that bushwhackin' hombre, Mark. Whether he's ever caught or not won't change things for the Rafter L."

The large eyes slid down to Mark's face with a frank plea in their depths. "Just do me one favor, will you?" Mark nodded soberly. "Stay with Sally until the ranch is goin' real good— At least 'till after roundup, so's she can depend on someone. Will you?"

"You got my word for it, Bob." Mark left the room abruptly. He wasn't being rude, but there was something burning behind his eyes that demanded cool, night air. He walked out into the ranch yard and looked up at the brilliant, brittle stars that shone down curiously on the quiet, brooding Rafter L. He didn't even turn when he heard footsteps that stopped beside him.

"What's the matter, Mark?"

He just shook his head and stared straight ahead. The distant, eerie cry of a coyote came down the mysterious night air and Sally looked up anxiously.

"Mark. You're not leaving?" Her voice was higher than usual and with a hint of a tremor in it. He swung around savagely, his face pale and drawn in the ghostly light. "No, Sally: I'll leave when I've finished two jobs here."

"What are they?"

"Gotten the Rafter L through it's round-up, an' found me a bushwhacker!"

MARK WAS pushing cattle back away from the border when two strangers rode slowly up to the Rafter L ranch house and asked for him. Sally showed them where to put their horses and made them a lunch while they waited. There was a little uneasiness in the pit of her stomach as she studied the men. Their clothing indicated a long, weary ride. One of them was cold-eyed, quiet, and wore two tied down guns; the other, an older man, looked like a drummer.

When she led up indirectly to their business with Mark they just smiled evasively and turned the subject to general topics. By the time Webb rode in, Sally was afraid. She met Mark at the corrals as he unsaddled and turned his horse loose and, fingers entwined, eyes large and worried, told him about the two strangers.

Mark listened calmly, flung his saddle over a pole on the top of the corral and looked down into her eyes. Something shattered his control then, perhaps it was the appealingly helpless and loyal look on her face. His grin sobered as he leaned against the corral, one arm still resting lightly across the saddle. "Sally, did anyone ever tell you you're beautiful?"

She was startled and showed it. Mark took the arm from across the saddle and shoved both hands into his levi pockets. He was as red as a beet.

"I'm sorry." There was a tumult of words in his throat but he couldn't express them sensibly so he started for the house.

Sally stood perfectly still and looked at him as he swung past. "Mark."

He stopped and turned, eyes smoky and ashamed. "Yes?"

"What about the two men in the house?"

He shrugged. "They're friends of mine; that letter you mailed for me brought 'em here."

He started to turn again when she walked a little closer to him and spoke: "In that case, then, I'll answer your other question; yes, I've been told that before, but I've never particularly wanted to hear it—before."

Mark didn't know what to say so he just looked at her and the mantle of red faded a little as they stood looking at one another. Sally smiled and Mark's courage came back in a rush.

"In that case I'll say something else then, and then you can fire me." He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and seemed to brace his shoulders. "I'm in love with you, Sally." He saw the startled look reappear and his own words sounded terribly blunt and crude to him so he talked on, trying to soften them. "I've known it since the day I met you on the trail an' you sent me after Parson Rigby. It's crazy an' I know it, but anyway, Sally, there it is." His eyes swept up and rested on hers. "Now you can fire me."

Sally saw the very self conscious little grin on his face and she smiled. "Don't be sorry, Mark. I wouldn't fire you, anyway. Will you do me a favor?"

"Sure: name it."

Her eyes were moist and her breathing came in fluttering little breaths from between her open lips. There was a mischevious twinkle in her eyes, along with a lot of tenderness. "Go in the house and see your friends."

Mark watched her turn, walk to the corral and lean against it. He understood, instinctively, that she wanted to be alone. He hesitated, then swung

around and headed for the house. For some inexplicable reason he felt guilty and ashamed.

- 4 -

WHEN MARK entered the Rafter L living room, two sets of quizzical, affable eyes were watching him. The man with the two guns got up casually and walked over to him with an outstretched hand.

"Mark, when you talk to real pretty women, you'd ought'ta know better than to do it where folks can see you from the window."

Webb avoided the kidding face, but shook the hand. "Y' damned nosy ol' dog. A man's got a right to..."

The well fed, professional-looking man laughed and got up with an outstretched hand. "Listen, son, it's about time you settled down."

Mark's face was red again and he grinningly, guiltily, motioned toward chairs. "Look, you chuckawallas, I didn't get you down here to spy on me; I got a story to tell you."

It didn't take long for Mark Webb to tell the strangers all he knew about Lambert's attempted murder and the state of the Rafter L.

When he was finished the older man got up. "All right, son, where's the wounded man?"

Mark led the way to Lambert's room, peeked in, got a gruff invitation to enter, and the three men walked to the foot of the bed.

Mark looked down at Bob Lambert. "Bob, I hope you don't get sore about it, but I've gone an' called my Dad to come down here an' look at you." He put a lean, bronzed hand on the heavy set man's shoulder. "This is my Father, Doctor Samuel Webb, of Nogales, an' I thought he might be able to at least look you over."

Bob Lambert's eyes were startled as they surveyed the capable looking man, then swung to the hard eyed, silent man next to him. Mark saw Lambert's eye appraise the other man. "This is my brother, Cal. I sort of figured he could help me around the ranch for awhile."

There was a long moment of quiet before Bob Lambert's eyes, blinking fast, turned back to Mark. "Dammit, you hadn't ought'ta made them ride all the way down here." It wasn't exactly a reproof, but old Bob felt he had to say something gruff; it was his way.

Doctor Webb nodded tolerantly and moved around to the side of the bed with the assurance of perfect confidence in himself. He stopped and looked at his two sons. "Suppose you boys go rope a cow, or ride a horse, or something, for awhile, and send that young lady in here to me."

Mark and Cal nodded and went out. They met Sally coming in and Mark introduced his brother, who managed a wide eyed and gulping "Proud to know you, Ma'm."

"Sally, my Father's in with Bob an' he want you to come in. He's a doctor, Sally." He hesitated, wanted to say something else, felt Cal's eye on him, and smiled instead as he went on out of the house followed by his brother.

"LORD, MARK, who'd ever of thought there was anything like that 'way out here?" Cal's face was smothered in a look of rapture. "Man, did you ever see anything like her? Hijo mano! She's..."

"Aw, shut up. I didn't get you down here to listen to your palaver." He fished the brass cartridge case out of his shirt pocket. "See that?"

Cal Webb took it and turned it over carefully as he studied it. "Yeah."

"I found it in the rocks where Lambert was shot."

Cal nodded slowly. "Mex shell. Out of a Mauser."

"That's the way I figure it; of

course, it don't help much, but at least we're pretty sure it was a Mex that plugged him.

Cal returned the shell case. "That all you got to go on?"

Mark sank into a chair on the veranda and his brother sat down next to him. "Yep: thats the whole case, so far." He began to roll a cigaret. "What d'ya reckon we ought to do now?"

Cal shrugged. "There's not much we can do. We can't go into Mexico an' round up every Mex packin' a Mauser; hell, they all got 'em. That's standard revolustionista equipment down there." He relaxed and looked out over the peaceful landscape. "We can nose around a little, but actually there's nothin' much we can do right off, anyway."

AT DINNER, that evening, Mark never saw Sally so radiant. Her eyes sparkled, and the lantern light cast shimmering flecks of pure gold from the sheen of her hair. Mark and Doctor Webb watched in high amusement as Cal stumblingly helped with the cooking, the table setting and the serving. There was a lump in Mark's throat every time his eyes crossed with Sally's. His Father knew this, too; his diagnosis of the Rafter L, in general, was acutely correct and precise. He hadn't missed a thing. In fact, he knew something Mark would have given his right arm to know.

When Mark met Sally, as he and Cal were saddling up to ride over the Rafter L, he asked her about her Father.

Sally's face was solemnly grateful. "Doctor Webb said that Dad should've had efficient medical help at the first—but that even so, the operation is comparatively simple; he's sure Dad'll be up and around in six months." The tears started then and she practically fell into Mark's arms. "Oh Mark, how can I ever thank you. I'm so grateful." Her body shook in tight sobs and Mark forgot that Cal was standing, open mouthed, a few feet away.

"I don't want gratitude, Sally. I'd have done as much for anyone."

HER TEAR-STAINED face came up and Cal ran a tender, caressing arm around the indifferent neck of his blocky bay horse as Mark's face went down and their lips met. The bay horse lay back his ears and darted a quick nip to Cal and the cowboy looked up, startled, to see that he had a handful of neck skin in his fist. He let go, quickly, coughed loudly and swung up on the horse.

"Oh Lord," Cal was rocking ecstatically in his saddle, "I don't want gratitude!" Mark was uncomfortably miserable and red faced. "Oh, not that line Mark." He leaned toward his brother with a wide eyed look on his face. "Back in Nogales I learned to say that in two languages, an' never got to first base. Look, hombre, use a different approach. Say—"

"Shut up, you loudmouthed sumphole. Dammit; you shouldn't have even been there."

Cal put up a protesting hand and a look of indignation swept over him. "Not been there? Hell, I have no way of knowin' when some love-sick renegade's goin' to come loose at the seams an' start kissin' people. My gosh, man, can't you give a feller a little warnin', like maybe shootin' off your gun, or havin' a fit, or somethin?"

Mark's embarrassed eyes swept the horizon unseeingly, widened, swung back and lost their unhappy discomfort. He reined up suddenly and pointed ahead. Cal, mouth still opened in protest, stopped and looked in the direction of his brother's arm. "What's that?"

Cal's face sobered in an instant. "Looks like three hombres drivin' some cattle." They sat still and watched the advancing cattle with three riders flanking them. The drive would come right past them, so they sat still and studied the scene. Cal's frown was intent.

"'Thought you said this was all Rafter L range an' there were no steady Rafter L riders?"

Mark nodded. "I did. We got no hired hands an' this is all Rafter L range. Deeded range in fact, an' no one's got a right to cross it 'thout permission." The cattle were closer now and they were veering off a little from the motionless riders. Mark frowned. "Hell, those're Rafter L cattle."

Cal looked at the large Rafter L branded on the right ribs of the critters, then his curious gaze lifted to the riders. Two were Mexicans and one was an American. The riders swerved off their course and approached the Brady brothers. Mark stole a quick look at Cal, whose relaxed figure was intent on the oncoming cowboys.

"Howdy."

"Howdy."

"You hombres work for the Rafter L?"

MARK NODDED his head. The Mexicans were both dark, wiry men with blank faces, booted carbines and sixshooters hanging from cartridge belts that also supported knives. They rode American stock saddle, though, and had manila ropes instead of their own native rawhide riatas. The American was badly pockmarked, thick-shouldered, with brittle, grey eyes, a thin, petulant mouth and two tied down guns, plus his Winchester .30-.30 carbine. Mark's eyes swung avidly to the Mexican's rifle boots, but all he could see was the butt plates, not enough to see whether the men had Mausers or not.

"Well, we picked up this little bunch of Rafter L cattle just over the line an' thought we'd bring back to you."

Mark nodded agreeably. "That was right decent of you."

The American shrugged. "Oh, it war'n't nothin'; we was comin' over anyway." He let his eyes slide from Cal to Mark. "They's another bunch of them where these come from, but they're in good feed an' we'll drive 'em back in a few days when we come back again."

Mark was mildly puzzled. "Tell us where they are, an' we'll go get 'em. No sense in you havin' to do our work."

The American smiled and shrugged. "Hell, we got business up here anyway an' besides, we know how to get 'em across without a lot of damn fool questions bein' asked." He winked meaningly. "Don't bother about 'em; we'll push 'em across in two, three days."

Cal and Mark thanked the men, offered to pay the, which was laughingly turned down, took over the cattle and began the drive to the Rafter L corrals after waving casually to the departing American and his two poker faced helpers.

- 5 -

MARK swung off his horse and slammed the corral gate behind the cattle as Cal pushed the last doggie through. They stood in silence looking at the animals.

"It could've happened that they drifted below the border, Cal. There hasn't been a steady rider on the Rafter L since Bob got shot; an' Sally's had to stay pretty close to her Dad most of the time—so it's possible they just strayed over there."

Cal nodded and began to slowly roll a cigaret. "Yeah; it makes sense, all right. But what doesn't make sense—to me, anyway—is why those shady-lookin' hombres would bring back such slick, fat cattle when they could'a sold them below the line for a damned good price."

Mark shrugged. "You're always fig-

[*Turn To Page* 82]

Only VARIETY CLUB MEMBERS Get This $4.95

8mm MOVIE VIEWER

FOR ONLY $1.95

Viewer alone without membership, $4.95

YES, you can get the spectacular $4.95 8mm Melton Viewer for only $1.95 when you join the VARIETY MOVIE CLUB! Think of it! This home-movie viewer sells everyplace for $4.95 and is the most entertaining way of showing the latest 8mm movie films available.

Your Own Private Movie Show!

No screen to set up. No rooms to darken. Load with one of our 50 ft. movies or your own and Presto—real live action motion pictures in a Jiffy.

Variety of 8mm Films Available

As a member of our Variety Movie Club, we send you the latest 8mm movie films DIRECT FROM HOLLYWOOD. Just specify the type of films you want.

"A" Variety Movies (Satires, Sports, Novelties) or

"B" Slapstick Comedies for the entire Family or

"C" Comedies and Mickey Mouse Cartoons for Children.

NO SCREENS TO SET UP!
NO ROOMS TO DARKEN

SEND NO MONEY

Your viewer will come with your first month's films. Pay postman on arrival. MONEY BACK GUARANTEE if you are not completely satisfied.

Membership Coupon

VARIETY MOVIE CLUB, Dept. DAG-1
Post Office Box 2589, Hollywood 28, Calif.

Please enroll me as a member of your Movie Club and send me two 50 ft. 8mm movies C.O.D. every month at only $1.25 each plus postage. I have the right to exchange for other films or return for refund for only 50c—and I can cancel at anytime without obligation.

☐ ***Also rush the new 8mm MELTON VIEWER with my first month's films for only $1.95 extra for the viewer (reg. price is $4.95).***

I prefer "A"_____ "B"_____ "C" Films_____

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ZONE_____STATE_____

Members pay only $1.25 for 50 ft. 8mm films regularly sold for $2.

urin' every down-at-the-heel puncher is a owlhooter. Hell, they're probably just as honest as any one in Lodgepole."

Cal lit the cigaret and answered wryly. "That ain't sayin' much, from what I saw of Lodgepole when we rode through it."

Mark was turning toward Cal to vent a little irritation, when one of the cows in the corral caught his eye. He studied her for a moment but she pushed in among the other animals and he clambered up the corral and perched on the top pole with a suddenly intent glint in his eye.

"Come on up here a minute, Cal."

Mark's brother heaved himself up. "Well? Do they look better when you're lookin' down on 'em?"

Mark's eyes flickered from one animal to another. He saw it again, and again—always in the same place too. He jumped down and grabbed his saddle horn, swung aboard and took down his rope. "Come on, Cal. We're goin' to stretch one out."

Cal grumblingly clambered down off the corral and opened the gate to let Mark through and led his own horse inside before he slid the gate latch-bar back into place. The cows pushed into an adjoining pen. Mark darted over to the next corral and slammed the gate, leaving one wild eyed critter inside with him. Cal was mounted, with a long loop draped over his shoulder, watching his brother's antics with a puzzled frown.

"Just what in hell's wrong with you?"

MARK IGNORED the question. "You want to head or heel?" Cal shrugged and nudged his horse a little closer. Mark quartered the cow and she moved away from the fence. Instantly his loop settled around her neck. She bellowed once and plunged, red eyed, with saliva dripping from her mouth. Cal watched his chance, flicked his rope, flipped his slack while his horse was backing; before she knew it, the cow was flat on her side. Mark dismounted, forced enough slack to shove one of her front feet through the strangling rope around her neck, thus assuring her enough rope tolerance to breathe, pushed back his Stetson and motioned to Cal.

"I was right. Come here an' look at this."

Cal dismounted and came forward, still wearing the puzzled look. The men squatted by the cow and Mark ran a hand over the long, shaggy white coat of her belly. He pushed back the hair and disclosed a raw-looking gash. Dried blood was sticking to the hair, but even so the men found several crude stitch marks. Mark sat back triumphantly on his spurs and looked at his brother.

"Well, brains, give me the answer to that."

Cal ignored Mark and probed the wound carefully with drawn eyebrows. He swung away from the cow and looked into the adjoining corral. "They all got it, by gosh. But you got'ta be on your nose in the dirt to see it."

Mark nodded. "That's right. Now what in hell's it mean?"

Cal got up slowly. "Turn her loose." They went back to their horses and worked the critter loose. She leaped to her feet, trembling, and they let her in with the others. She forced her way deep into the mass of dark red bodies and the two brothers unsaddled and turned their stock loose in a horse corral.

"Got it figured out yet?" Cal sank down on the cracked and bleached mending bench outside the barn. He shook his head as Mark rolled a cigaret.

"Well, I have."

"All, right, Casanova, let's have it."

Mark puffed slowly, abstractly on the cigaret. "The way I got it figured, somebody drove those cattle over the line, slit their hides open, stuck something in there like dope or gold, patched 'em up again an' drove 'em back over the line without arousing any interest,

[*Turn To Page* 84]

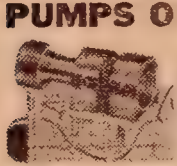
Meridian's NEWEST!

New Electric Paint Peeler

Gets to bare wood fast

New, faster SUPER-POWERMET peels old paint, enamel, varnish, shellac clean to base wood grain like cutting butter with a hot knife. Super-hot tube softens paint electrically. Removes up to 12 layers fast as 3½ square feet per minute. A heavy-duty professional-type tool. Ends scraping, cutting, burning, sanding, chemicals. Just plug into any 110-120 volts AC or 600 Watts DC outlet and allow to heat to 1200 degrees in less than two minutes. Then put it to work on interior or exterior regular or irregular surfaces, like woodwork, clapboards, floors, cupboards, doors, furniture, boats and see it peel off paint like magic. Can be used for removing wall paper, paint from plastered walls, asphalt tile from floors. Heating surface measures 3x7 inches. Complete with 8 foot U.L. approved heater cord. ONLY $11.98 postpaid. If C.O.D., send $2.00 deposit, balance plus postage charges.

PUMPS OUT 300 GALLONS PER HOUR



DRAINS CELLARS, SWIMMING POOLS, FISH PONDS, BOATS, EXCAVATIONS, WELL-HOUSES, FLOOD AREAS. Lifts water 6 feet.

New DRAINMASTER solves your flood and drain problems. Ends back-breaking bailing and hand-pumping jobs. Pumps out all water, right down to floor. OPERATES WITHOUT ELECTRICITY. Just connect DRAINMASTER between two lengths of garden hose; attach one end to handy faucet; run other end out of window or to drain-off area. Turn on faucet and watch DRAINMASTER go to work, pumping out 300 gallons per hour. Made of lifetime brass; no moving parts to wear or jam. Be ready for flood emergency—order now. Remit only $2.98 with order and we pay postage. If C.O.D. you pay postage.

OPENS CLOGGED SINK WITH ONE STROKE

Now you can do away with chemicals that eat away pipes, cause expensive plumbing bills, ruined clothing, spattered walls, floors. Completely safe in operation. DRAIN-BLO builds up to 60 lbs. pressure. Just one swift downward stroke opens up sink instantly. DRAIN-BLO is light and easy to use. Overall length 13¼ inches. Fits all sinks except those equipped for garbage disposal. Order DRAIN-BLO now and have when needed.

ONLY $3.98 postpaid

GUARANTEE

Every product is guaranteed to be exactly as represented. You must be 100% satisfied with your purchase, or we will cheerfully refund the purchase price. We realize that our success rests upon the complete satisfaction of our customers. Under our guarantee, the customer is always right. Buy with confidence. Our money back guarantee protects you.

MIGHTY GILHOOLIE OPENS AND RESEALS ANY BOTTLE OR JAR

Strong-arm Helper for Kitchen or Bar

Even the daintiest feminine hand has giant's grip when MIGHTY GILHOOLIE is used to open bottles and jars. MIGHTY GILHOOLIE takes fight out of most stubborn screw-top, from nail polish to big jars. Lifts soda caps and pry-off lids with greatest of ease. Does job so neatly and without distortion, perfect reseal job can be done. Not a gadget, but a handsome precision tool; Made of stainless steel. Saves foods, beverages, money. Get one for yourself—others for friends. ONLY $2.95 postpaid. If C. O. D. plus charges.

SEWS LEATHER AND TOUGH TEXTILES LIKE A MACHINE

With SPEEDY STITCHER Automatic Sewing Awl, anyone can quickly and skillfully sew or repair anything made of LEATHER, CANVAS, NYLON, PLASTIC, or other heavy materials. Sews firm, even lock-stitches like a machine. Gets into hard-to-reach places. Specially made for heavy duty sewing on LUGGAGE, FOOTWEAR, RUGS, AWNINGS, SAILS, SADDLERY, UPHOLSTERY, OVER-ALLS, AUTO-TOPS, SPORTS GEAR, and other tough sewing jobs. Here's the handiest tool you'll ever own. Will save you many times its small cost. Comes ready for instant use ...complete with bobbin of waxed-thread and 3 different types of diamond-pointed needles. Easy-to-follow directions will make you an expert in minute. Extra needles and waxed-thread always available. Save money, send $1.98 for postpaid delivery. If C.O.D., $1.98 plus postage.

WORLD'S LOWEST PRICED ADDING MACHINE

ONLY **$2.95** *postpaid*

GUARANTEED ACCURATE
ADDS UP TO ONE BILLION

Stop making mistakes! Become a "whiz" at figures. The BABY CALCULATOR is not a toy, but an accurate calculator that works as easily and reliably as expensive machines. With flick of finger, you can ADD, SUBTRACT, MULTIPLY, DIVIDE. **ADDS UP TO ONE BILLION.** Precision made. Compact as a watch. Fits pocket or purse. Thousands in use by Students, Shopkeepers, Housewives, Small Business Men, and others who can't afford costly mistakes. Saves many times small cost in preventing losses. Handsome carrying case at no extra cost. 10 DAYS FREE TRIAL. Money back guarantee. We pay postage if you send $2.95 with order. If C.O.D. postage added.

EASIEST WAY TO

SCRAPE PAINT OFF GLASS

New KWIK-SKRAPE takes the "pain" out of painting window frames. Now, you can paint them as fast and easily as flatwork. No more need to use small brush and special care. Use large brush and purposely let paint run over on glass to do better weather-sealing job on frames. When paints sets, simply zip off runovers, smears, spatters and have a straight-lined, weather-sealed job. Ends fumbling with putty-knife or blades. Send only $1 for postpaid delivery.

MERIDIAN PRODUCTS CO. Dept. DA 366 Madison Ave. New York 17, N. Y.

then opened 'em up on this side, took out whatever they'd sewed in, and brought 'em on home."

CAL APPROPRIATED his brother's tobacco sack as it was disappearing into Mark's shirt pocket and rolled a cigaret. "Lord, what a trick. 'You s'pose that's it?" He nodded slowly before Mark could answer. "That'd account for how the contraband gold gets into the country all right, at that." He nodded his head. "Clever, dammit; damned clever."

Mark smoked slowly and his eyes were squinted. "Cal, it all fits together now. Listen, see how it sounds to you. Bob Lambert's constant ridin' was keepin' his cattle away from where the renegades could drive off a few head an' besides, him bein' abroad all the time made it hard for 'em to hold and work the critters once they were across the line; so they blasted him. After that, they had it all their way. No interference; no trouble gettin' Rafter L cattle that they'd 'return' every now an' then, and a nice quiet length of border where it was pretty safe to operate."

Cal turned at the sound of footsteps and hastily doffed his hat as he arose, speaking quietly out of the corner of his mouth. "Here comes the future missus Webb. You got it figured about right, but don't tell anybody on the Rafter L; this is our little secret."

Sally smiled uncertainly. "Am I interrupting something?"

Cal shook his head with elaborate slowness. "No ma'm. Nothing that won't keep. I'll go up to the house an' see how Dad's makin' out with his patient. See y'all later." Mark wanted to laugh at the way his brother got out of there.

"Sit down, Sally."

"What're you two conspirators up to, Mark?"

He shrugged casually. "Nothin' much; we just corralled a bunch of Rafter L critters some riders said

[*Turn To Page* 86]

A Haunting Novel of the Hunted!

RUN, LITTLE MEN!

by Eric Frank Russell

A New J. Fenimore Yost story

MAYHEM FOR THE MIDDLEMAN

by Alan Ritner Anderson

Another Simon Ark mystery

THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

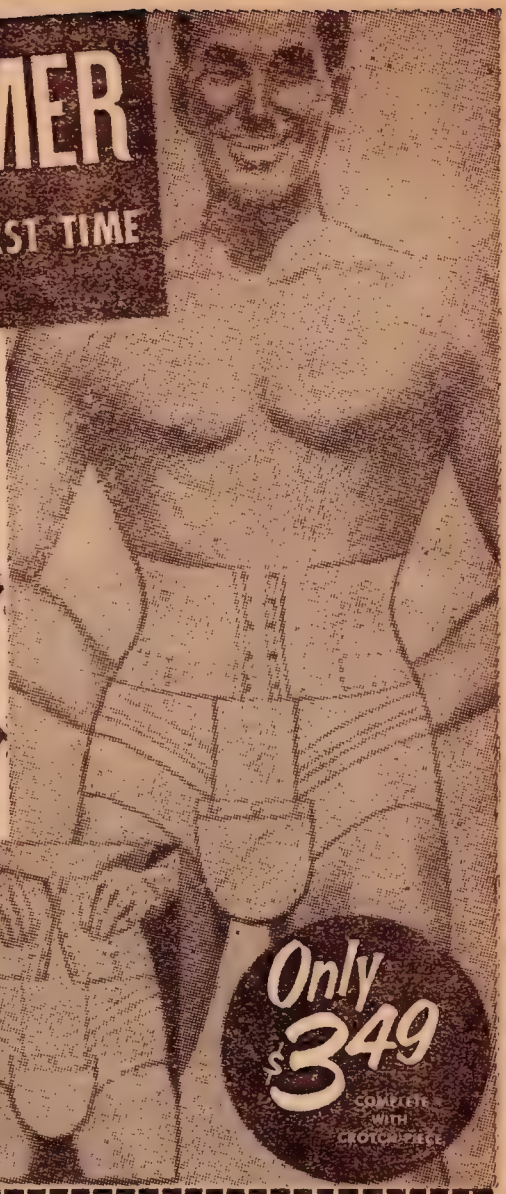
by Edward D. Hoch

Look for the June

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

FIGURE SLIMMER

NOW OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME



THE NEW FIGURE SLIMMER COMBINATION
ADJUSTABLE WAIST AND ABDOMINAL LEVELER

Now reduce that waist and abdominal bulging look instantly. Figure Slimmer pushes back in the droopy bulging abdominal protuberance and lets you take in your waistline and do away with flabby midriff look instantly. Look at the picture and see how it works.

SLENDERIZES BOTH ABDOMEN AND WAIST

Figure-Slimmer corrects the faults of other garments. Some hold in the stomach but push out the waist. Figure Slimmer slenderizes both the waist and abdominal appearance at the same time. You will look inches slimmer and feel wonderful.

HOLDS BACK TOGETHER

Figure Slimmer is wonderful for that falling-apart back feeling. It's firm, gentle compressing action makes you feel good and secure and enables you to continue to do your daily work feeling less tired, less broken down. Send for Figure Slimmer now and begin enjoying a figure-slimmed appearance at once.

APPEAR INCHES SLIMMER—LOOK BETTER

Don't let a heavy weighing-down "corporation" and a balloon waistline get you down. Figure Slimmer flattens your front and takes in inches of your appearance. Clothes will look well on you now!

ADJUSTABLE

Figure Slimmer's adjustable feature makes it easy for you to have a small waistline look. Trousers now look good and fit swell. You can take yourself in more inches if you wish, with this novel adjustable feature.

Only $3.49 COMPLETE WITH CROTCH PIECE

TRY 10 DAYS
SEND NO MONEY

Try at our risk no money to pay. Figure Slimmer. Just fill out the coupon and we will send you the Figure Slimmer by return mail. Wear it 10 days. Then if you are not satisfied with the results you had expected return it and the full purchase price will be refunded. Mail coupon now.

Only $3.49 (or waist sizes above 46 $3.98 plus 25¢ postage. All sizes state waist size and if extra crotch piece.

WARD GREEN COMPANY, Dept. P-853
43 West 61 St., N. Y. 23, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

Rush for ten days approval the new Figure Slimmer. After wearing for ten days I can return it for full refund of purchase price if not completely satisfied with results.

Check one:

☐ Send C.O.D. and I will pay postman plus postage.

☐ I enclose $3.49. Send it prepaid. ($3.98 for waist sizes 46 and up.) EXTRA crotch pieces—50¢ ea.

My waist measure is.....inches

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....

For Unusual, Gripping Tales of Tomorrow . . .

Look for the big, pocket-sized Issue Number 29 of

FUTURE

SCIENCE FICTION

Featuring all new and complete stories

If your dealer is sold out, send 35¢ to COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 241 Church St., New York 13, N.Y.

Unsurpassed Comfort With Improved

RUPTURE ★ RELIEVER

NO FITTING REQUIRED
ADJUSTABLE FOR YOUR COMFORT

FOR MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN

AT LAST A NEW FORM-FITTING WASHABLE BRACER WITH ADJUSTABLE LEG-STRAPS THAT'S GUARANTEED TO BE THE MOST COMFORTABLE YOU EVER WORE! NO SNAPS, NO LACES, NO STEEL. Amazing new kind of flat groin pad for support with complete comfort. BEST TOO AS AFTER OPERATION SUPPORT. Order by MAIL. ☐ RIGHT SIDE $3.95. ☐ LEFT SIDE $3.95. ☐ DOUBLE $4.95. Measurement around LOWEST PART OF ABDOMEN IN INCHES IS: ..... inches. SENT ON APPROVAL. AVOID SERIOUS DELAY • • SOLD ON MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

WRIGHT BRACER CO.
Dept. 154., 318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

EXPERT DICE
CARDS, INKS, etc.
STRONG! RELIABLE!
FREE CATALOGUE
Send for it today!
O. C. Novelty Company., Dept. 5
1311 W. Main Oklahoma City 4, Okla.

FREE CANADA-NEWFOUNDLAND COLLECTION
including Early Issues, Commemoratives, Pictorials, and High Values. Plus Set of Fascinating Triangle Stamps. Plus set of Unused British Colonies. Plus Large Stamp Book. All Four Offers Free. Send 10c to cover postage.
EMPIRE STAMP CORP., Dept. WA, Toronto, Canada

they'd pushed out of Mexico."

Sally smiled. "I know. I saw you and your brother corralling them."

Mark changed the subject abruptly. "How's Bob?"

"All worked up, Doctor Webb says we'll get Parson Rigby tomorrow, and by using him instead of either one of you, we'll operate on him."

Mark frowned slightly. "Sally; there's always a risk. I mean—"

"I know what you mean, Mark. Dad knows it, too, but he's awfully impatient to get on with it. He says he'd rather be dead all over than half dead." She looked down at her lap. "He's always been such an active man, Mark." Abruptly her head swung up and the faith and courage in her innocent eyes made Mark look away. "It'll come out all right, Mark, I know it will."

Mark and Cal rode after the Parson and returned with him, left him with Sally at the ranch house and rode quickly off across the Rafter L range. Cal was muttering more to himself than his brother as they rode away.

"Never had no stomach for it, damned if I did."

Mark knew what he meant and remained silent. They scoured the range until they found what they were looking for, a torn up, ragged section of ground where one man had held the stock off a ways, while two men roped and stretched them out in order to retrieve the contraband. They even found little hard cakes of dried blood. Cal was a little pale when he remounted.

"Cuttin' an' brandin' aways makes me a little sick; but deliberately cuttin' under a critter's hide, sewin' somethin' into it, then openin' them again, makes me real sick."

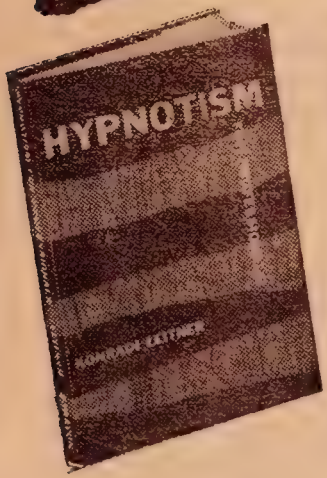
Mark nodded. "A man that'd do that is worse than an animal."

CAL AND Mark split up. Cal rode off heading Northwest, apparently in a hurry, while Mark appeared to be making a more leisurely survey of the

[*Turn To Page* 88]

JUST OUT!

the First Book of its kind ever Published



HYPNOTISM

for Professionals

by Konradi Leitner

A book that goes beyond the mere demonstration of the technique of hypnotising. Now for the first time the real secrets of hypnotism are revealed. The mental processes of both hypnotist and subject are bared so that the student can understand what really goes on.

Leitner explains not only how to hypnotize but the reason for every act, gesture and spoken word. The student no longer need imitate blindly but really know and understand why!

SPECIAL FEATURE! MEDICAL HYPNOTISM!

A full chapter is devoted to a demonstration of how hypnotism is used as a therapeutic device.

Actual case histories showing how hypnotism is used as an aid in overcoming difficulties arising from psychological causes are given.

ILLUSTRATED WITH MANY FULL-PAGE "HOW TO" PHOTOGRAPHS

It's easy to follow these instructions

Contents:

The State of Trance

Matters of Degree
Some Are More Suggestible
Asleep, or not Asleep
The Cataleptic Test
The Reluctant Subject
No Rude Awakening
Illusions, Unlimited
Memory Lane
After the Trance is Over
For Experts Only

Induction Among Friends

Establishing Rapport
The Light Trance
The Doubting Subject
Removing the Doubt
The Overanxious Subject
A Young Subject
An Aid to Education
The Deep Trance
Detective Work
Self Hypnotism

On Stage

The Opening Speech
The Audience is With You
The Invisible Cord
The Critical Point
The Chosen Few
Confidence and Control
Effective Performance
Ending the Show
Stage Hypnotism Photographically Illustrated

If Mesmer Could Have Known

From Cult to Craft

Scorn's End
Hypnotism Today . . . and Tomorrow

A Few Quotes From Important Publications

The American Journal of the Medical Sciences
Interesting and frank discussion of hypnotism as it is carried out by a professional hypnotist. The presentation of material and the suggestions offered are conservative and dignified. The conciseness of the "how to do it" technique is commendable.

THE SAN FRANCISCO PROGRESS
Hypnotism is neither mysterious nor remote, but an instrument which may one day serve you. Enchanting photos, too.

RETAIL BOOKSELLER
The science of hypnotism explained in detail. The author, a professional hypnotist, shows the scientific value of hypnotism. Full-page photographs and a glossary of terms.

LOS ANGELES EXAMINER
Step-by-step explanation of techniques of stage and therapeutic hypnotism by a practitioner of the former. Has valuable bibliography.

JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY.
Clear and interesting.

MAIL TODAY

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER COUPON . . .
For Limited Time Only

ONLY $2.49 REGULAR PRICE $4.00

Offer valid only if sent on this coupon . . . MAIL TODAY!

STRAVON PUBLISHERS Dept. HP-592
43 West 61 Street, N. Y. 23, N. Y.

Yes I want to take advantage of the special 40% discount offer. Send me Hypnotism for Professionals for 10 days free examination.

☐ Send C.O.D. I'll pay postman $2.49 (not $4.00) plus postage.

☐ I enclose $2.49 (not $4.00) Stravon pays postage.
I'll get my purchase price refunded if not 100% satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

You can earn a High School Diploma in your own home! Prepare yourself for a better job and more pay. Study in your spare time . . . No classes . . . all materials furnished. Certified teachers. Valuable diploma awarded.

WRITE TODAY FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION

SOUTHERN STATES ACADEMY
Box 144 -DA Sta. E, Atlanta, Georgia

STOP TOBACCO

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write Today for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved over 300,000 people.

In Business Since 1909

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
268 Brentwood Sta., St. Louis 17, Mo.

MORE JOBS—BIG PAY IN
AIR CONDITIONING
& REFRIGERATION

NEW WAY TO LEARN AT HOME

MAKE MORE MONEY in this *uncrowded* field. New CTI *Shop-Method* teaches repair and installation at home. *You get 23 big practical training kits*—you build and keep an air conditioner, freezer, refrigerator or milk cooler. Earn up to $5 an hour while training. *Write for new FREE BOOK.*

COMMERCIAL TRADES INSTITUTE Dept. R-248
1400 Greenleaf Avenue • Chicago 26, Ill.

"NOW I'M MY OWN BOSS at Double My Former Salary" As A CUSTOM UPHOLSTERER

Paul M. De Vita, Former Low Paid Auto Mechanic Steps-Up Earnings to Over $100 a Week

"I can hardly believe how quickly I've gotten ahead in this interesting and profitable trade. I was a mechanic making $55 a week. Now I operate my own shop and make over $100 a week. UTS Training has been invaluable."

WHAT DO YOU WANT? Your Own Profitable Business—A Steady Job—Substantial Spare-time Earnings—A More Secure Future? They're all waiting for YOU in the Big-Opportunity Field of Custom Furniture Upholstery.

The big nationwide housing boom has created a great demand for trained upholsterers. Prepare for this well-paid trade—easily, quickly. You can earn as you learn to make good money all year 'round at home, in your own shop, or in a well-paid job. The practical N. Y. State-approved UTS Course teaches you professional custom furniture upholstery, reupholstery, slip-covers, furniture finishing, window cornice, cushion, and drapery making. You get—FREE with Course—ALL tools, complete frames and materials to make beautiful furniture, yours to keep or sell.

FREE ILLUSTRATED BOOK WITH SAMPLE LESSON!

Our FREE book, "YOUR NEW WAY TO A SUCCESSFUL CAREER" with Sample Lesson shows you how. WRITE TODAY! Training in N. Y. School also available. UTS, Dept. EA-4005, 721 B'way, N. Y. 3

MAIL COUPON TODAY

APPROVED FOR VETERANS

UPHOLSTERY TRADES SCHOOL, Dept. EA-4005
721 Broadway, New York 3, N. Y.
Send me FREE book and FREE Sample Lesson. No obligation—no salesman will call.
☐ Home Study ☐ In N.Y. School Training

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone .... State .....
☐ Check if Korean Veteran

Rafter L property line which, naturally, ran only as far as the national boundary line. The brothers had held a long talk before splitting up and the day was well spent before they met again at the corrals of the Rafter L. Mark appraised his brother as the latter was unsaddling. Cal had the whitish, powdery dust on him that was indigenous to the country around Lodgepole.

"Well; how'd it come out?"

Cal slung his saddle on the corral rail and grunted with the effort. "All right. Just as we figured it should. How's Lambert?"

Mark turned toward the house. "Don't know; I haven't been up there yet. Come on."

Parson Rigby met them in the living room. He was white faced and tense. "That was an ordeal, gentlemen, that I'd not care to repeat."

Mark looked searchingly into the Parson's face with a sinking feeling in his stomach. "How'd it come out?"

Rigby sank weakly into a chair and shook his head as he mopped at his forehead with a white handkerchief. "Oh, Bob's going to be all right; the Doctor said so." He looked up suddenly, eyes pinioning Mark. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Mark shrugged. "Never had a chance. Besides, when we first met I didn't see—"

Rigby held up a hand. "Yes, I know; Code of the West. None of my, ahem, darned business who your Father was." He dabbed at his forehead again. "I see now why your Father said you boys weren't any good at a thing like that. Neither am I."

Cal turned slowly when Sally entered the room. The strain had been a killing one and it showed. She was blank except for her large, direct eyes which, in the tight, blanched background of her face and the bloodless line of her mouth, looked twice as large and appealing. She sat down slowly and Cal put a clumsy, protecting arm

[*Turn To Page 90*]

HERE IS THE KIND OF HE-MAN BODY YOU CAN HAVE!

WHAT'S THE SECRET?

You can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back; add inches to your chest, develop a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours powerful, shoot new strength into your backbone, exercise those inner organs, cram your body full of vigor and red-blooded vitality! The new "home gym method" that's the surest, best and most inexpensive. It has changed many a 90 lb. weakling to a he-man. It has turned many a skinny boy into a marvelous physical specimen. It can do the same for you! *No $50.00 courses. No expensive gadgets.* You simply use the inexpensive home gym which helps you use the dormant muscle power in your own body. You will watch it increase in double quick time into solid muscle. The home gym method is easy! Only 10 minutes a day in your own home! You can use the home gym method in the morning or at night for no longer than it takes to shave or get dressed—when you use the home gym method you'll be using the method used by many of the greatest athletes, used by football players, wrestlers, fighters and men who keep in trim!

No matter how skinny or flabby you are the amazing new muscle power body builder can help you gain inches of solid muscle in double quick time — only 10 minutes a day!

THE HOME GYM IS SOMETHING EVERYONE WHO WANTS A BETTER BUILD WILL PRIZE! JUST MAILING THE COUPON MAY MEAN THE TURNING POINT IN YOUR LIFE!

NO EXPENSIVE GADGETS! NO $30 TO $100 COURSE!

You will get miraculous results...You will keep that sparkle of youth and you will experience a new zest for life. All it needs is 10 MINUTES A DAY, only 10 minutes. You will look better, you will feel better, you will think better, you will be better in every way, and you will have a body you don't have to be ashamed of. Because it is so simple the cost of your home gymnasium is trivial, when compared with what it can do for you. It will last you a lifetime. You can't break it with ordinary use. Remember this little home gym must do everything we claim — circulate your blood...tone up your muscles — relax those nerves that are so keyed up that you are ready to scream — it must make you feel more pep and vitality than you ever had in your life. It must work or it doesn't cost you a penny. Full price only $2.98.

SOLD ON A MONEY BACK GUARANTEE— ONLY $2.98. MAIL COUPON NOW!

YOU MAIL THE COUPON BELOW AND YOU CAN PROVE TO YOURSELF YOU CAN BE A NEW MAN! THE SECRET METHOD CALLED THE "*HOME GYM METHOD*" HAS DONE WONDERS FOR THOUSANDS. HERE'S WHAT IT WILL DO FOR YOU IN JUST 10 MINUTES A DAY!

Just mail the coupon below, then in 10 minutes you will soon be convinced that you can have the kind of body your friends admire—there's no cost if you fail! No matter how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be—if you can flex your arm you can add solid muscle to your biceps in amazingly quick time!

YOU TOO CAN BE TOUGH! GAIN REAL MUSCLE POWER! BE AN ALL AROUND WINNER! DEVELOP NEW STRENGTH AND HE MAN LOOKS!

YOU CAN BROADEN YOUR SHOULDERS—STRENGTHEN THE MUSCLES THAT COUNT, IN ONLY 10 MINUTES A DAY—RIGHT IN YOUR OWN HOME—YOUR MONEY BACK IF YOU FAIL!

You can gain handsome power packed muscles all over! Improve your he-man looks 1000%. You can win new strength for money-making work! For winning at all sports! You'll be admired by everyone! You'll turn your old skeleton frame into a he-man body. You'll be on the road to being big and strong! No matter how skinny or flabby you are you can turn yourself from a wreck to the strongest of strong...You can develop your 520 muscles and gain confidence...you will see inches of mighty muscle added to your arms and chest...you'll see your back and shoulders broadened, you'll gain size, power, speed, from your head to your toes...You'll be admired by all...You'll be a winner where muscles count! Many gain up to 60 lbs. of muscle and add inches to chest and arms... Many turn fat into muscles...You can develop your back, your grip, your legs—you'll look, feel, act, like a real he-man. You'll find it easier to win women and men friends... You'll win in sports, win promotion, you'll win more praise and popularity! You get everything you need in one compact package you do-it-all-in just 10 minutes a day, with the HOME GYM. You get complete and full instructions with the HOME GYM... you'll be amazed at how easy it is to get in shape and stay in shape with the HOME GYM

WIN A SILVER CUP — Awarded to Users Making Greatest Improvement in Next 3 Months

—MAIL THIS NO-RISK COUPON TODAY—

HOME GYM CO., DEPT. 81
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

PLEASE RUSH THE HOME GYM WITH FULL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ONLY $2.98 complete!

☐ I enclose $2.98 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90¢ postage by sending $2.98 with my order).

☐ I enclose $3.98, send Deluxe Model.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE.....

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

AUTO MECHANICS
EARN AS YOU LEARN AT HOME
BIG PAY! SEND FOR 2 NEW FREE BOOKS
Learn the No. 1 trade—get into America's largest industry. Earn up to $125 a week and more. Enjoy security—thousands of mechanics needed to service 50 million cars and 10 million trucks. New CTI Home Training prepares you in just a few months. Tools and Tune-Up Kit sent. Write for FREE BOOKS.
COMMERCIAL TRADES INSTITUTE Dept. A-259
1400 Greenleaf Avenue Chicago 26, Illinois

FOOL YOUR FRIENDS!

Terrific new gag for Parties and Gatherings. This new deck of cards will amaze and puzzle everyone. LOOKS LIKE ANY ORDINARY DECK and can actually be played with in regular card games. Yet by just a glance at back of each card ONLY YOU CAN TELL immediately what each card is. In addition you receive a combination of 4 obedient dice, 1 pair trick, 1 pair regular. Complete instructions on "How to do Card Tricks".
Order today. Mail M. O. or check. Only $2.95 Postpaid. KAUFMAN NOVELTIES, 145 Seabreeze Ave, Dept. D, Brooklyn 24, N.Y.

FUTURE DETECTIVES
BE YOUR OWN BOSS
Would you like to open your own agency? We send you one sheet of answers and tips including information that is helpful to those seeking permits. Also a thin billfold badge and a membership I-D Card for your signature. All sent postpaid for $1.00.
GEORGE W. MALLUM
6459 Sheridan Rd. Chicago 26, Ill.

SONGWRITERS
YOUR SONGS PUBLISHED
$1200.00 ADVANCE ROYALTY PAID YEARLY
COMPLETE SONG WRITING SERVICE
Let us try to help you be a success in this field. Music composed for your words. Records and copies furnished.
GUARANTEED PUBLICATION
We guarantee the publication of at least one song each month by a legitimate B.M.I. music publisher. The writers receive advance royalty and a standard royalty contract. The publisher pays all publication expenses.
WHAT ARE YOUR CHANCES?
If you have ability your chances are good. Now song-writers become famous every year. Maybe this is YOUR year. Publishers are constantly on the lookout for good songs. Turn your material over to a firm whose business is SONGWRITING.
WRITE TODAY
SEND YOUR POEM or lyric today for free examination and complete information on our exceptional offer.
Dept. P, 1609 Vista Del Mar, Hollywood 28, Calif.
HOLLYWOOD TUNESMITHS

across her shoulders. He knew he ought to say something, but he was tongue tied so he patted her gently, awkwardly.

Of the Rafter L, probably the least affected were the patient, who slept deeply from the opiates, and the surgeon, who blandly went about cleaning instruments, a fragrant Havana cigar jutting rakishly from the corner of his mouth. It was Doctor Webb who finally raised the morale of the others sufficiently to warrant interest in dinner and, while Sally mechanically went about getting the meal, the Parson excused imself and rode hastily back toward Lodgepole as soon as the first smell of frying meat assailed his nostrils.

It had been a trying day and the Rafter L slept soundly through the deep, velvety night, serenaded by the wise little prairie wolves who laughed at the moon and sang to one another across the broad sweep of the slumbering land.

- 6 -

AL AND Mark left the Rafter L before the others were stirring. They had planned it that way. There were awkward questions they wanted to avoid answering and moreover there was the possibility, since they knew practically nothing of the men they were after, that their calculations might go astray.

The sun was high when Mark rode back from the slight eminence of Tiburcio rocks to Cal. He nodded brusquely. "It's workin', Cal. They're comin'; I could jus' barely make 'em out."

Cal smiled wolfishly and the two men swung off across the range toward the border. They hadn't ridden a mile

[*Turn To Page 92*]

10 CHILDREN'S DRESSES ALL FOR ONLY 3.45 used

Tremendous assortment! Good condition, ready to wear. Washable, colorful cottons! Price includes all 10 dresses!

SPECIAL
10 Children's Dresses at this low LOW price!

Sizes 1-6X	$3.45
Sizes 7-14	$3.95

FREE GIFT WITH EVERY ORDER!
RUSH ORDER NOW! Send $1 deposit now! Pay postman balance plus C.O.D. and postage.
$1 DEPOSIT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER!
No order accepted without $1 deposit.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE
You must be 100% satisfied with merchandise or return within 10 days for refund. BUY from us for LOWEST PRICES and HIGHEST QUALITY.

PEOPLES MAIL ORDER HOUSE
15 HESTER ST., DEPT. DA NEW YORK 2, N. Y.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____
NO ORDER ACCEPTED WITHOUT $1 DEPOSIT.

Age	Size	Price

YOUR PHOTO ON A STAMP

100 FOR $1.00

Glossy, Distinctive FULL STAMP SIZE photo prints made from any picture! Use them to personalize greeting or business cards, stationery, invitations, circulars, etc. Attach $1.00 to photo or snapshot, returned unharmed with sheet of 100 perforated and gummed photo stamps.

MINIATURE PHOTOSTAMPS DEPT. 155-B
P.O. Box 44, Williamsbridge Station
New York 67, N. Y.

GIRLS

GET YOUR MAN

and make him yours FOREVER. Why take chances against other women who may be using mysterious charms? Here is your chance to learn and use Secrets of Sex Appeal so powerful that even bad women can keep good men while good girls go without.

HOW TO WIN AND HOLD A HUSBAND

contains the very essence of confidential advice that a great Love and Marriage Expert has given to thousands of women—all reduced to a simple set of rules—an easy formula that you can learn to use to WIN YOUR MAN. **10-DAY TRIAL**—Just send your name and address today and on delivery deposit only $2 plus postage with your postman. (Or send $2 with order to save C.O.D. and postage.) Use for 10 days. I positively GUARANTEE that you will be more than delighted or your money back promptly and no questions asked. Order At Once.

LARCH, 118 East 28, Dept. 441-F, N. Y. 16

God WANTS YOU

To Be Really Happy! Are you facing difficult Problems? Poor Health? Money or Job Troubles? Love or Family Troubles? Are you Worried about someone dear to you? Is someone dear to you Drinking too Much? Do you ever get Lonely—Unhappy—Discouraged. Would you like to have more Happiness, Success and "Good Fortune" in Life?

If you have any of these Problems, or others like them, dear friend, then here is wonderful **NEWS**—News of a remarkable **NEW WAY** of **PRAYER** that is helping thousands to glorious **NEW** happiness and joy! Whether you believe in **PRAYER** or not, this remarkable **NEW WAY** may bring a whole **NEW** world of happiness and joy to you—and very, very quickly, too!

So don't wait, dear friend. You will surely bless this day—so please don't delay! Just clip this Message now and mail with your name, address, and 3¢ stamp to **4-LIFE-STUDY FELLOWSHIP, Box 5010, Noroton, Conn.** We will rush this wonderful **NEW** Message of **PRAYER** and **FAITH** to you by **AIR MAIL** absolutely **FREE!**

ADD MULTIPLY CALCULATE at a glance!

Essential For—
SCHOOL
BUSINESS
HOME-SHOP
FACTORY
OFFICE

RAPID-FIRE CALCULATOR for vast number combinations — and fractions, too.
SAVES HOURS of tedious figuring. GUARANTEED ACCURATE. QUICK ANSWERS GET YOU AHEAD FASTER!

Stop wasting precious time figuring. Now even a Schoolboy can get 100% accurate answers at a Glance!
A PERMANENT CALCULATOR — ONLY 50c
ORDER NOW on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!
WEHMAN BROS., Dept. DA 712 B'way, N.Y. 3, N. Y.

LINGUAPHONE
MAKES IT EASY TO LISTEN and LEARN to Speak

SPANISH (AMERICAN or EUROPEAN) • FRENCH
GERMAN • ITALIAN • RUSSIAN
MODERN GREEK — Any of 34 languages available
for 10 DAY FREE TRIAL at home

With LINGUAPHONE—The World's Standard Conversational Method—You Start to SPEAK another language TOMORROW—or IT COSTS YOU NOTHING!
For just 20 Minutes a Day you listen to Linguaphone's life-like recordings. It is easy—AND FUN—to learn another language AT HOME with LINGUAPHONE—the same natural way you learned to speak before you went to school.
Only LINGUAPHONE brings 8 to 12 of the world's best native language teachers into your home. You hear both men and women speak about everyday matters in their native tongue. YOU understand—You SPEAK correctly as they do. It's like living in another country.
That's why Linguaphone is used 'round the world by educators, governments and business firms. More than a million home-study students of all ages.

Send today for Free booklet, "Passport To A New World," that tells about Linguaphone and details on how you may obtain a COMPLETE Course-unit in the language you choose on FREE TRIAL.

Linguaphone Institute, Phone: Circle 7-0830
T-166-058 Rock Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Please send me: ☐ FREE Book ☐ Information on FREE Trial. No obligation, of course.

My language interest is .....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone ... State .....

The World's Standard Conversational Method for Over Half a Century

DO YOU WANT POWER?

Power to make you victorious in all you undertake? Power to make people admire you? Power to earn money? Power to gain popularity—love? Power to make anyone follow you? I will send you information which is the result of scientific research. This information and directions will help you become more masterful and exert greater influence. You will be able to break prevailing misconceptions. IF YOU ARE NOT DELIGHTED, YOUR MONEY IMMEDIATELY REFUNDED. Just send your name and address. Pay on delivery $2.00 plus postage or send $2.00 cash or money order and I will pay postage.

FREE with every order: Talismanic Seal of Luck in blood-red ink on Egyptian mottled parchment.

SECULAR PRODUCTS, Dept. 138-B
125 BROAD ST., NEW YORK 4, N. Y.

Lovely used DRESSES

The biggest bargains we have ever offered. Prints, solids, rayons, cottons, etc. Assorted styles and colors. Sizes 10 to 18. 10 for $4.95. Larger sizes 6 for $3.05. Send $1 deposit. Balance C.O.D. plus postage. Your $4.95 refunded if dissatisfied, or merchandise exchanged, if desired. Many other clothing bargains for entire family.

10 for 4.95

POSTCARD BRINGS FREE CATALOG
Allied Mail Order Co., Inc., Dept. 107-W
102 CHRISTOPHER AVE., BROOKLYN 12, N. Y.

before they reined up and sat silently watching a repetition of the former cattle drive. The same three men were driving a small herd of Rafter L cattle back from below the border. As they swept in closer, Cal grunted. "The same hombres. Ol' Pock Face and his cucarachas."

Mark held up his hand and the riders left their herd and came toward the brothers.

The venemous looking gringo was smiling broadly. "Jus' like I tol' ya. He brang 'em back." He shrugged casually. "We was crossin' anyway, through, like I tol' ya, so we really ain't puttin' oursel'es out none."

Mark grinned sardonicaly. "No; of course not. In fact it'd be kind of unhandy for you to come across without bringin' the Rafter L cows back, wouldn't it?"

The renegade's face lost its triumphant smile. His eyes flickered between the two silent, watching cowboys before him and his tongue made a quick, darting circuit of his thin lips. "What ya mean, hombre?"

Cal spat disdainfully before he spoke. "A man that'd rip up a dumb critter's hide to conceal contraband so's he could sneak it across the border is just about the lowest specimen I can imagine."

The renegade's hands were resting lightly on the saddle horn. He was silent for a long moment before a blustering smile broke out over his features. "Aw, now listen boys; a man's got to make a livin', ya know." He motioned casually to the uneasy, drifting cattle. "After all, them cows ain't hurt much, an' besides, what's it to you hombres, anyway; them's Rafter L cattle, an' there ain't no call for a couple of hired riders to get 'witez' about it."

Cal's hand went up slowly and flipped up the flap of his shirt pocket. A glitter of morning sunlight flashed brilliantly off the little badge pinned there. The renegade didn't have to get

any closer to see the lettering that said, *"United States Deputy Marshal"; he* had seen more than one of those badges in his long, checkered and unsavory career.

MARK KNEW it was coming and was braced, but even so it happened so fast he was almost caught off guard. The American renegade hadn't moved his hands. They still lay athwart the saddle horn while his wily eyes searched the two faces in front. It was one of the chollos who made the break, and that was the key for all of them to go into action. The Mexican yanked his six—gun out with more murderous fury than skill; but, since he was partially concealed from the Webbs by the American outlaw, Mark was two seconds behind in his own stab for a gun. The chollo was screaming curses and imprecations as he fired. The shot was close to Cal, but it missed; Mark's gun was in his hand as all hell broke loose.

Cal swung his horse sideways as the American renegade sank in his spurs, pulled a gun, leaped ahead and fired, all at the same time. The shot was wild but it served it's purpose. The gringo was riding wide open across the range in a frantic bid for freedom. Cal cursed, yanked his horse around and leaped out in savage pursuit. Mark fired twice more at the Mexican alambrista who had first opened hostilities. The man sat straight in his saddle, a look of amazement on his face. He swung his gun up again, looked wide—eyed at Mark, hesitated then slumped forward, falling heavily, soddenly off his snorting horse.

Mark was moving as he fired. He had odds of two to one and, until he downed the first man, he didn't want to icrease his danger by sitting still. When the first Mexican slid off his his horse the second one swore a violent Spanish oath, whirled his horse and rode bent low over the animal's neck toward the border and safety.

[*Turn Page*]

To The Man With

HERNIA

Who Can Not Submit To Surgery

The man condemned to live with rupture, all too often faces a grim future.

There is only one known cure...and that is surgical correction. Yet, for many, this relief must be denied or delayed for any one of a variety of reasons. It is to this group of unfortunate persons that this message is directed.

There are two choices—to wear a truss, or not to wear one. But, since hernia never heals itself, and generally continues to become more severe, the second choice is eventually eliminated. That leaves only one question in the mind of the hernia sufferer: "What kind of a truss should I wear?" Until recently there was little choice. Most trusses all looked alike. They consisted of a leather covered steel spring which snapped around the hips, firmly pressing an unyielding pad against the hernia opening. Many hernia victims chose to be semi-invalids and risk danger of strangulation, rather than wear a truss.

Now a New Way to Support Hernia

Less than two years ago a man who had suffered from hernia himself for many years devised a new kind of support. It was so totally different from other trusses that the United States government recognized its exclusive design by granting him a patent.

Now this new device is available to hernia sufferers everywhere. It is revolutionary. There are no steel springs. No leather. No hard, gouging knobs. No unsightly bulk. "RUPTURE-GARD," as this new hernia support has been named, is **suspended from the waist.** There are no cruel straps, bands or springs around the hips to chafe and rub. It is as comfortable to wear as a pair of trousers—and just as easy to slip on or off.

There are no complications—such as ordering a "double," "right" or "left." RUPTURE-GARD takes care of all reducible inguinal hernia, providing safe protection for the person with double hernia, and desirable "balanced" pressure for the person with hernia on just one side.

The broad, flat pad is molded from firm, yet comfortable foam rubber, covered on the top by strong nylon mesh for cool comfort and complete washability.

You'll like RUPTURE-GARD. If you have hernia—or know someone suffering from this affliction—won't you do yourself a real favor right now, and mail the coupon below? There's absolutely no obligation—and you'll get the complete facts on RUPTURE-GARD by return mail, in a plain envelope!

THE KINLEN CO., Dept. DO-66
809 Wyandotte, Kansas City 5, Mo.

TEAR OUT AND MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

The Kinlen Co., Dept. DO-66
809 Wyandotte St., Kansas City 5, Mo.
Rush me in a plain envelope, full information about RUPTURE-GARD. I understand there is absolutely no obligation on my part.

Name .....

Address ..... Zone .....

City ..... State .....

Shrinks Hemorrhoids New Way Without Surgery

Science Finds Healing Substance That Relieves Pain—Shrinks Hemorrhoids

For the first time science has found a new healing substance with the astonishing ability to shrink hemorrhoids and to relieve pain — without surgery.

In case after case, while gently relieving pain, actual reduction (shrinkage), took place.

Most amazing of all — results were so thorough that sufferers made astonishing statements like "Piles have ceased to be a problem!"

The secret is a new healing substance (Bio-Dyne*)—discovery of a world-famous research institute.

This substance is now available in *suppository* or *ointment form* under the name *Preparation H.** Ask for it at all drug counters—money back guarantee. *Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. TA-20, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

Free VALUABLE U.S.A.

Sensational Get-Acquainted Offer!

Get this scarce genuine postage stamp, as illustrated, picturing first U.S.A. (issued in 1847!) PLUS big collection of 30 all-different United States: 19th century, valuable 25 stamp, etc. PLUS collection beautiful Commemoratives including '93 Columbian, Boy Scouts, Wild West, many others. EXTRA: other exciting offers; 64-page Collector's Guide; Big Bargain Catalog of U. S. Stamps. *Send 10c for mailing costs.* Supplies Limited. Act Now!

HARRIS, 2644 Transit Bldg., Boston 17, Mass.

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Send your Poems today for Free Examination to

J. CHAS. McNEIL

A. B. MASTER OF MUSIC

510-DA So. Alexandria, Los Angeles 5, Cal.

LUCKY LODESTONES?

MAGNETIC LODESTONES are truly LEGENDARY as the ancient Romans and Greeks used them in BIBLICAL TIMES and thought that MAGNETIC LODESTONES were cloaked with MAGICAL and SUPERNATURAL POWERS. We offer our LEGENDARY BRAND pair of highly MAGNETIC LODESTONES, the same type that the ANCIENTS may have used. Our LEGENDARY BRAND of highly MAGNETIC LODESTONES come to you in a red flannel bag, together with a so-called Talismanic Seal of LUCK No. 26, as shown in the 6th and 7th BOOK of MOSES by Louis de Claremont. All FOUR items for only $2.00 postpaid or $2.50 C.O.D. We make no claims and sell them only as curios.

LEGENDARY CO., 125 BROAD ST.
Dept. 222-B, New York 4, N. Y.

FAMOUS WESTERN

Mark rocketed along, eyes squinted against the rush of cool morning air against his face. Occasionally the Mexican would turn in his saddle and throw a wild shot at Mark in the desperate hope that it would slow down his pursuer but Mark bored in, his horse slowly gaining on the mount of the fugitive, which had been used hard, roping cattle most of the night, and was tired and weary from work and sleeplessness.

What happened to Mark and his prey was wholly unexpected. The Mexican's horse, stumbled, regained its footing, stumbled again and fell heavily on it's side, catapulting its rider violently through the air. He struck the ground, rolled several times and to Mark's everlasting amazement, bounced to his feet, teeth bared, hair awry and the powdery dust rising from his like a steam, gun blazing.

Mark yanked back and slid off his horse, turning the animal sideways as he went. A bursting, red hot blast of pain went through his right leg and the knee buckled as he hit the ground. Another bullet tore his Stetson from his head and sent it sailing like a frantic black bird off across the range. Mark was on one knee when he fired. The Mexican was spraddle legged, teeth bared, his eyes were wild and shiny. Mark thumbed two more shots and saw the Mexican stagger, weave slightly and thumb his gun again. Mark felt the ghostly song of death as the renegade's bullet went close past his face. He raised his gun carefully, unmindful of the Mexican's fire, aimed carefully and was in the act of squeezing the trigger, when the wobbly renegade caved in and fell flat on his face.

A GENTLE, sighing little stray zephyr picked the moment of silence after the wild gun fight, to blow caressingly among the grass. Mark got painfully to his feet, holstered his gun and slit the seam of his levis for a

[*Turn To Page 96*]

Catch More Fish... AUTOMATICALLY!

SENSATIONAL BOB-O-MATIC CASTING FLOAT HOOKS YOUR FISH AUTOMATICALLY THE INSTANT HE BITES

Here's a really clever new invention that now automatically enables you to catch those fish you've been losing. Human reaction is often too slow to set the hook at the right instant, so Bob-O-Matic does it for you automatically. The instant a fish bites—WHAM! the automatic trigger goes to work at lightning speed setting the hook firmly in the mouth of the fish in just 1/50 of a second. YOUR FISH IS CAUGHT! Takes only one second to re-set trigger. Fish over and over until you've caught more than you can carry. Don't delay! Order now and really enjoy fishing at its very best Complete with instructions

Bob-O-Matic floats upright to show you exactly where the bait is riding and automatically allows the bait to reach the depth you desire.

only $1.98

Cast more effectively with Bob-O-Matic than with ordinary floating rigs because the weight is concentrated in one place close to the sinker and the baited hook

Bob-O-Matic assures you of coming home with the biggest catch and the most admiring glances. You can fish off a boat, a bridge, leave for a drink, or take a nap. Bob-O-Matic does the work for you. It hooks the fish and keeps him hooked.

Sensational Features

- Slip line casts more effectively than ordinary float rig.
- Automatically allows bait to reach desired depth.
- Permits reeling fish as close to rod tip as possible.
- May be used as fixed position bobb.
- Sets hook automatically in 1/50 of a second to assure a big catch.

Money Back Guarantee

Bob-O-Matic is guaranteed to catch fish automatically. If you're not 100% delighted, your money will be refunded.

Money Back Guarantee

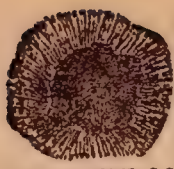
Sportsman's Post Dept. DA-5
Lynbrook, N. Y.

Rush Bob-O-Matic automatic fisher to me at once on 10 day free trial offer at $1.98

☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman on delivery plus a few cents postage.
☐ I enclose payment. Sportsman's Post will pay postage.

Name .....

Address .....



Believe In WISHES?

Carry a Pair of Genuine Brahma Red Live Highly Magnetic Lodestone legendary "Good Luck Wishing Charms!" Extra Powerfully Magnetic! Famous for many years! Carried by thousands of people for various secret Wishes! A Curio, we make no supernatural claims. $1.97 for 2. Postpaid with Information, or $1.97 C.O.D. plus Postage. Money Back GUARANTEED! Order NOW! Copyright '55—

ASTROL CO., Dept. R-26 Main P.O. Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

SONGS = $$$$$$

Share $29 million yearly. Songs Composed, PUBLISHED, promoted. Appraisal, Info FREE. Send to

NORDYKE PUBLISHING CO.

6000 SUNSET BLVD., Hollywood 28 DA, Cal.

MEN PAST 40

Men afflicted with Bladder Trouble, Getting Up Nights, Pains in Back, Hips, Legs, Nervousness, Dizziness, Physical Inability and General Impotency send for our amazing **FREE BOOK** that tells how you may correct these conditions and have new health and Zest in Life. Write today. No Obligation.

Excelsior Institute, Dept. 9301, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

SEND FOR

Free Record

START SPEAKING

SPANISH

or

FRENCH

ALMOST OVERNIGHT!

MORE MONEY

NEW CAREER

TRAVEL FUN

HERE'S the easiest way to learn a new language. Listen to FREE 2-sided non-breakable record. Let your eyes follow words in FREE sample lesson. Almost at once you'll be chatting whole sentences in your new language *with a perfect accent!* There are no "strings" to offer. But it may end soon. Rush name, address with 25c to help cover cost of special packaging, shipping of free record, lesson. State language you want. We'll also send free information on full Cortina course. No obligation.

Also: GERMAN ITALIAN RUSSIAN JAPANESE BRAZILIAN

CORTINA ACADEMY

"Originators of the Phonograph Method"

Dept. 1253, 136 W. 52nd St., New York 19, N. Y.

close inspection of his leg wound. The sticky warmth of his own blood was slippery where it ran down his leg into his boot. Apparently the renegade's bullet had missed the bone of his upper leg, but, judging from the agonizing sensations that permeated him when he probed it, the slug hadn't skirted many muscles or nerves. Relieved to see that the wound wasn't particularly dangerous, Mark grimaced wryly and hobbled toward the downed Mexican. He rolled the man over and studied him closely. There were two bullet holes in is body. One was low in the abdomen, which must have been the first to hit him, while the second was in the right side of his chest. The man was dead.

Mark was in process of hobbling up to his snorting horse when Cal loped up. His face was damp with sweat and his eyes were slits. "Well, I see you got yours too."

Mark climbed laboriously aboard his horse with clenched teeth. "'You get the gringo?'"

"I chased him right into the sheriff's arms. In a way it was sort of funny. After talkin' to the sheriff when I went to Lodgepole yesterday, the old boy must've gotten downright indignant that smugglers would use his territory for their labors. He was comin' across the range toward the Rafter L and this renegade smuggler was hightailin' it like a cut cat when the sheriff an' his posse loomed up. The posse just sort of fanned out an' closed in with this renegade in the middle. He was caught

[*Turn To Page* 5]

before he knew what it was all about."

The horses were moving slowly and each impact of a hoof on the hard ground sent a jolt of pain through Mark. Cal noticed the whiteness of his brother's face. "You hit?" Mark nodded. "Bad?"

"No; just a slug through the leg above the knee, but I've felt more like dancing in my life."

Cal frowned. "You ride on to the Rafter L an' I'll meet you there as soon as I check on the other one. The sheriff's there waitin'."

Mark shook his head. "No; I'll go with you an' we'll both ride in later."

The first casualty of the brief, savage battle was still on the ground where he had fallen off his horse. He wasn't dead, but he wasn't effervescent with life either. Cal hoisted him onto his own horse like a sack of flour, tied him securely and the men rode on to the Rafter L buildings where they turned their prisoner over to the Sheriff's posse. Sally and Doctor Webb literally swept Mark into the house, under his expressions of mild resentment and irritation while Cal and Sheriff Molden from Lodgepole talked in the warm, sunlighted yard before the old house.

"Hell, Marshal, why didn't you check in at the office when you come through Lodgepole? I've of been plumb glad to work with you."

CAL SMILED affably and shoved his Stetson to the back of his head. "To tell you the truth, Sheriff, I had no idea it was a federal job when I came down here from Nogales. All I knew was that my brother, Mark, wrote me to come on down an' bring our Father; that a man he was workin' for had been mysteriously shot." He shrugged his broad shoulders. "I didn't know there was anything really wrong until the evenin' before I rode in to talk with you. In fact no one knew I was a deputy U. S. Marshal until t[illegible] here smugglers showed up."

Molden looked at the sulking, cowering American renegade where he stood with the posse. "Hey, hombre. Which one o' you shot Bob Lambert?"

The evil, dissolute face came up and the baleful eyes swung to the wounded Mexican tied across the horse. "That danged fool there; his name's Sence Pastor."

The sheriff stuck out his hand. "Well Marshal, 'reckon I'd better get back to town with these two. Stop in the next time you're in town."

Cal assured him he would as he watched the posse ride away, then he turned slowly and went up to the house. There was a low rumble of voices as Cal entered the living room. Mark was explaining to Sally why he hadn't mentioned the fact that his brother was a deputy U. S. Marshal, and Sally was sitting close to the bandaged leg listening. Cal cleared his throat and Sally turned.

"What's the matter Cal? 'Have a cold?"

Cal shook his head carefully. "No, but every once in awhile folks forget I'm around and—"

Mark snorted. "Aw shuddup." His voice was full of disgust. "Just 'cause a man kisses his future wife once—"

"Oh; so it's a future wife now is it?"

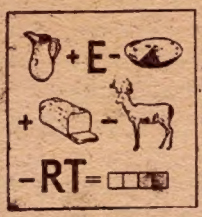
Sally was reddening and Mark squirmed comfortably. "Well, what's wrong with gettin' married, anyway?"

Cal shrugged as he moved toward Bob Lambert's room where two voices came faintly to him as Doctor Webb and his patient hashed over the unexpected happenings of the day. "Nothin'. Nothin' at all. In fact people are doin' it every day or so. But in your letter you said you wanted to clear up this mess for the sake of vengeance alone against the men that shot Lambert." Again the shrug. "Sure's a funny way to get revenge; marryin' man's daughter."

Sally was smiling through her embarrassment and Mark was glowering. "Aw shuddup, ya flannel mouth."

———— ☆ ————

Can You Solve These 3 Puzzles?



No. 1

Solution is one of last names below:
Johann E. BODE
Henry FORD
Alice CARY
Alexander G. BELL
Johann S. BACH
William PACA

No. 2

Solution is one of last names below:
Robert BURNS
John BROWN
Ethan ALLEN
Alfred E. SMITH
H. G. WELLS
Sigmund FREUD

No. 3

Solution is one of last names below:
John GAY
Will H. LOW
Walter MAP
Edgar W. NYE
Robert E. LEE
Samuel J. WAY

SEND IN YOUR ANSWERS ON COUPON BELOW AND RECEIVE FREE DETAILS ON HOW YOU MAY SHARE IN

$50,000.00 1st Prize May Become Yours!

Fun and Fortune Await You in This Fascinating Contest

The Sample Puzzle below will give you an idea of how to solve the interesting name-puzzles featured in the $100,000.00 Opportunity Puzzle Contest. And the puzzles you see above are actually the first three official puzzles of the contest. First, of course, study the Sample Puzzle, and read carefully the explanation printed along with it. Then try solving Puzzles No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 above, and see if you can find the famous name represented by each puzzle, in the list of names printed under it.

In this way you will get a taste of the enjoyment and challenge presented in the puzzles of this contest. And as to the thrill of winning, can't you yourself imagine what it would be like to win $50,000.00, $10,000.00, $7,500.00 or any other of the cash prizes shown at the right! This may indeed be the opportunity you've been waiting for!

Act today to get in on this great opportunity!—fill in your answers to Puzzles 1, 2, 3 on the coupon of the lower left. Also fill in plainly your own name and address, and mail the coupon promptly to the address shown. We will then rush you additional puzzles, rules and details explaining just how you go about making yourself eligible to win $50,000.00, $10,000.00, $7,500.00, $5,000 or any other of the cash sums to be awarded. Don't put it off!

Solve the three puzzles above, and mail the coupon TODAY!

OPPORTUNITY PUZZLE CONTEST
Dept. 33 ... P.O. Box 89, Freeport, N. Y.

Listed in box at right are my answers to Puzzles 1, 2 and 3. I am interested in your $100,000.00 Cash Prize Contest and would like you to send me—without charge or obligation—the set of basic puzzles together with full rules and details as how I may win $50,000.00 First Prize or any other of the 400 prizes.

Puzzle No. 1 _____
Puzzle No. 2 _____
Puzzle No. 3 _____

Name.....

Address.....

This SAMPLE PUZZLE Will Give You the Idea!

Before trying to solve Puzzles 1, 2 and 3 above, let's solve this Sample Puzzle:

Note the various letters and objects, and the plus and minus signs. C plus OWL plus EYE plus TANK ... gives us COWLEYETANK. Next, minus TOWEL minus CAN means that from COWLEYETANK we take away the letters TOWELCAN, leaving YEK.

Now, in the list of names under the puzzle, we see the last name of Francis Scott KEY, and by re-arranging the letters YEK to KEY, we have KEY as the correct solution to this puzzle.

SOLUTION IS ONE OF LAST NAMES BELOW:
Edward W. BOK
Robert E. LEE
Peter PAN
Francis Scott KEY
Edgar Allan POE
ART

$100,000.00

IN CASH PRIZES

AS YOU READ this page, you have before you a truly remarkable opportunity . . an opportunity to win thousands and thousands of dollars in an exciting, fascinating contest with new and stimulating puzzles.

Today! — right now! — ACT on this opportunity! See the three puzzles printed above. And, following the procedure explained with the Sample Puzzle in the lower part of this page, see if you can find the name each puzzle represents.

When you have done that, fill in your answers to the three puzzles, along with your own name and address, on the coupon in the lower left corner of the page. Mail the coupon promptly — to the address shown — and we will send you, FREE and entirely without obligation, full rules, details and the official set of basic puzzles of the Opportunity Puzzle Contest, in which $100,000.00 in Cash Prizes will be awarded.

Yes — any one of 400 cash prizes may become yours in this contest — a 1st Prize of $50,000.00! — a 2nd Prize of $10,000.00! — a 3rd Prize of $7,500.00! — a 4th Prize of $5,000.00! — or any one of the other prizes shown in the official prize list printed at the right.

Someone Must Win! Why Not You!

400 CASH PRIZES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1st PRIZE	$50,000.00
2nd Prize	$10,000.00
3rd Prize	$7,500.00
4th PRIZE	$5,000.00
5th PRIZE	$2,500.00
6th PRIZE	$1,500.00
7th PRIZE	$1,500.00
8th PRIZE	$1,000.00
9th PRIZE	$1,000.00
10th PRIZE	$1,000.00
11th thru 15th, ea.	$200.00 . . . $1,000.00
16th thru 30th, ea.	$100.00 . . . $1,500.00
31st thru 100th, ea.	$75.00 . . . $5,250.00
101st thru 150th, ea.	$50.00 . . . $2,500.00
250 Additional, ea.	$35.00 . . . $8,750.00
TOTAL	$100,000.00

THIS MAY BE YOUR TIME TO WIN!

You've read of others winning big prizes. You've seen their pictures in the papers. Well, maybe this is YOUR time to win!

Think of what it could mean to you! The home you've always dreamed of! A college education for your child! Perhaps going into business for yourself!

Act today on this great opportunity . . . presented under sponsorship of the publishers of The Standard International Encyclopedia . . . and designed to publicize this great reference work and further its distribution.

Believing people like puzzles, and puzzles are educational, the sponsors have combined the challenge of puzzles with the opportunity to get rich—

Act TODAY - This May Be YOUR OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME!

WHAT Every AUTO MECHANIC Wants to Know

A motor vehicle is a machine of many parts, each part designed and constructed for its own special function.

All good mechanics, like good doctors, should know the working theory and operation of each part and understand what causes trouble and how to remedy it.

LET AUDELS AUTO GUIDE SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

Every auto mechanic, helper, serviceman and operator can use a copy of AUDELS AUTOMOBILE GUIDE. The information it gives saves time, money and worry. Highly indorsed by all users. It presents the whole subject of auto mechanics from A to Z in plain language and simple terms.

This Big Practical Book gives full information with working diagrams covering the principles, construction, ignition, service and repair of modern cars, trucks and buses.

A complete Guide of 1600 pages, with over 1500 illustrations showing inside views of the working parts, with instructions for service jobs. Diesel engines, Fluid and Hydra-matic drives fully explained.

IT PAYS TO KNOW HOW TO

How to fit pistons—How to [illegible] necting rod bearings—[illegible] condition valves—How to adjust carburetors—[illegible] service automatic transmissions—[illegible] just steering gear—[illegible] ice distributors—How to [illegible]

INFORMATION

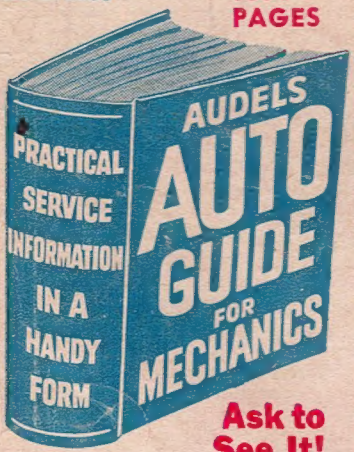
73 INTERESTING C[illegible]

on which practical information is given quickly under the headings as shown below

All Parts of an Automobile—Automobile Engine Principles—Multi-Cylinder Engines—Automobile Engines—Stationary Parts—Moving Parts—Pistons—Piston Rings—Connecting Rods—Crank Shafts—Valves—Valve Gear—Cams and Cam Action—Valve Timing—Cooling Systems—Fuel Feed Systems—Dual Fuel Feed—Mixture—Carburetors—Carburetor Service—Automatic Choke—Super-Chargers—Transmissions—Special Transmissions—Fluid and Hydra-matic Drives—Clutches—Universals and Propeller Shafts—The Differential—Rear Axles—Rear and Front Suspension—Running Gear—Brakes—Wheel Alignment—Knee Action—Steering Gear—Tires—Lubricants and Lubrication—Automotive Electricity—Ignition Systems—Magneto Ignition—Spark Plugs—Ignition Coils—Distributors—Automatic Spark Control—Ignition Timing—Generators—Starters—Generator and Starter Testing—Lighting Systems—Storage Batteries—Charging and Testing—Diesel Engines and Trouble Shooting.

A Ready Reference

1664 PAGES



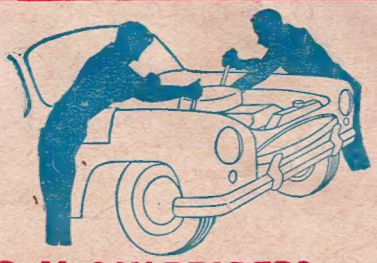
Ask to See It!

7 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

TO GET THIS ASSISTANCE FOR YOURSELF SIMPLY FILL IN AND MAIL COUPON TODAY.

$4 COMPLETE PAY $1 A ONLY MO.

AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N.Y.



O. K. SAY READERS

"Well Worth the Price" "SAVED ME $50"
"Most Useful and Complete"
"It has my Highest Recommendation"
"The Best Money can Buy"
"Easy for the Mechanic to Understand"

Sent on 7 Days Approval

Step up your own skill with the facts and figures of your trade. Audels Mechanics Guides contain Practical Inside Trade Information in a handy form. Illustrated and Easy to Understand.

Mail Coupon Today. Check the book you want for FREE EXAMINATION.

Pay Only $1 a Month. Nothing to pay Postman.

CUT HERE

ORDER

AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

Send me for FREE EXAMINATION books checked below. I decide to keep them I agree to pay $1 a month on each book or set ordered and [illegible] on each book or set until I have paid purchase price I will return them.

- ☐ MECHANICS GUIDE, 1664 Pages. $4
- ☐ [illegible] GUIDE, 1299 Pages . . . 4
- ☐ [illegible] MANUAL, 575 Pages 2
- ☐ [illegible] HANDY BOOK, 1650 Pages . . . 4
- ☐ BUILDERS GUIDE, 400 Pages 1
- ☐ BLUE PRINT READING, 416 Pages 2
- ☐ MATHEMATICS & CALCULATIONS, 700 Pages. 2
- ☐ SHEET METAL PATTERN LAYOUTS, 1100 Pages 4
- ☐ SHEET METAL WORKERS HANDY BOOK, 388 Pgs. 1
- ☐ MECHANICAL DRAWING GUIDE, 160 Pages . 1
- ☐ MECHANICAL DRAWING & DESIGN, 480 Pages 2
- ☐ AIRCRAFT WORKER, 240 Pages 1
- ☐ TELEVISION SERVICE MANUAL, 434 Pages. . 2
- ☐ RADIOMANS GUIDE, 1040 Pages 4
- ☐ ELECTRONIC DEVICES, 216 Pages 2
- ☐ ELECTRIC MOTOR GUIDE, 1000 Pages 4
- ☐ WIRING DIAGRAMS (Light & Power), 272 Pgs. 1
- ☐ ELECTRICIANS EXAMINATIONS, 250 Pages. . 1
- ☐ ELECTRIC POWER CALCULATIONS, 425 Pages. 2
- ☐ HANDY BOOK OF ELECTRICITY, 1440 Pages. . 4
- ☐ ELECTRIC DICTIONARY, 9000 Terms 2
- ☐ ELECTRIC LIBRARY, 7000 Pages (12 Book Set) 12
- ☐ SHIPFITTERS HANDY BOOK, 250 Pages . . . 1
- ☐ REFRIGERATION & Air Conditioning, 1280 Pgs. 4
- ☐ MILLWRIGHTS & MECHANICS GUIDE, 1200 Pgs. 4
- ☐ POWER PLANT ENGINEERS GUIDE, 1500 Pages 4
- ☐ ENGINEERS & FIREMANS EXAMS, 525 Pages . 1
- ☐ PUMPS, Hydraulics & Air Compressors, 1658 Pgs. 4
- ☐ OPERATING ENGINEERS LIBRARY (3 Books) . 9
- ☐ MECHANICAL DICTIONARY, 950 Pages . . . 4
- ☐ GARDENERS & GROWERS GUIDES (4 Book Set) 6
- ☐ CARPENTERS & BUILDERS GUIDES (4 Book Set) 6
- ☐ PLUMBERS & Steamfitters Guides (4 Book Set) 6
- ☐ MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDES (4 Book Set) 6
- ☐ PAINTERS & DECORATORS MANUAL, 450 Pgs. 2
- ☐ HOUSE HEATING GUIDE, 1000 Pages 4
- ☐ OIL BURNER GUIDE, 384 Pages 1
- ☐ HOME APPLIANCE SERVICE GUIDE, 800 Pages 4

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

Employed by_____ D.A.